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THE TEXAN BRAVO;

—OR,—

THE LONE STAR OF TEXAS.

A Tale of Early Life in the Southwest.

BY DR. JAMES H. ROBINSON.

THE DUEL—THE TREACHERY OF WIKOFF.

BOSTON:

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BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

WELCOME AID.

CHAPTER I.

THE ALAMO.—WALTER ETHINGTON.

THE first beams of the morning sun were saluting the "Lone Star." A man forty years of age, wearing the uniform of a Texan officer, was standing motionless upon the margin of a prairie, not far from the Colorado River; it was the general-in-chief of the forces raised to repel the invasions of the "Napoleon of the West," and shake off a despotism revolting to men deeply imbued with republican sentiments. The general had received tidings from Colonel Travis, in command of Fort Alamo, San Antonio de Bexar, that he was besieged by overwhelming numbers, and could not maintain his position unless reinforcements were speedily sent to his relief; and he had added, that while the Alamo held out and successfully resisted the enemy, signal guns should be fired at sunrise every morning.

The colonel had redeemed his promise, and for many successive days the booming of distant cannon had been heard rolling over the prairies with a mournful sound, as if heralding the fate of the devoted garrison. General Houston, after accepting the command, which had been tendered him for the second time, and addressing a patriotic speech to the convention (which took the place of the provisional government) at Washing-

ton, mounted his horse, and without loss of time rode toward Bexar.

For several mornings he had heard the signal guns which were to assure the friends of the cause of Texas that the Alamo was yet in the hands of Travis and his men. At the juncture to which we have referred, he was in the act of listening with intense interest to catch the low thunder of the distant ordnance.

It was in vain that he bent forward and placed his ear to the ground; the sounds which would have been so welcome did not reach him. It was the hour when he had been bidden to expect the signal guns, and he felt assured that his sense of hearing, rendered acute by long practice, had not failed in this instance. With a dejected countenance he returned to the spot where he had left his party, mounted his horse, and went forward in the direction of Bexar as fast as practicable.

Early on the following morning he again listened anxiously for the signal, but with no better success. While thus engaged other sounds attracted his attention. He heard horses approaching at a gallop, and in a moment they came in sight—two in number. The foremost was ridden by a white man of fine figure, the other by a negro of gigantic proportions. Both were begrimmed with powder, dust and smoke, and their clothes were torn and stained with blood, while the perspiration was streaming from the flanks of their overtaxed steeds. The general instinctively laid his hand upon his side-arms as he hailed the approaching horsemen.

"Are you friends or foes?"

"Either," responded the man in advance, in a careless tone. "A friend, if you intrude not upon my rights; a foe, if you wrong me."

"That is according to the great law of nature," answered the general. "It is the motto of the free sons of the forest. But be more definite. Do you fight beneath the banner of the 'Lone Star,' or where the flag of the Dictator of Mexico is thrown out to the breeze?"

"I am from the Alamo," replied the other.

"From the Alamo?" exclaimed the general, quickly. "I was just listening to hear the signal guns."

"You will listen long ere you hear them; their thunders are silenced forever, and the gallant hearts that manned them are cold in death."

"In the name of Heaven, tell me all without delay!" cried the general, greatly excited. "What has been the fate of Travis, Crocket and Bowie, and their brave followers."

"Death, sir!" said the horseman, clenching his fist, and setting his teeth hard together. "They have been murdered in cold blood, and after they had capitulated."

"How many escaped the slaughter?" asked the general, in a suppressed voice.

"Myself and servant, and a woman with a child in her arms, are all that survive to tell the story of Mexican duplicity."

"A band of braver men never trod the earth," said the general, turning suddenly from the horseman and dashing a tear from his eye. "Peace to their souls in that land where there is no oppression, and where the white flag of peace waves eternally."

"Amen, from the deepest fountains of my heart," responded the stranger.

"Would to Heaven they had listened to me," continued Houston, sorrowfully,—"blown up the fort and retired to Gonzales. But be it far from me to reproach them; they acted as they thought for the best, and no doubt left marks of their prowess upon the enemy."

"They fought nobly, sir."

"By what miracle did you and your servant escape?"

"Those who seek death seldom find it," returned the horseman.

"Are you weary of life?" asked the general, regarding him attentively.

"I have sought an honorable death on many a hard-fought field; let that be my answer. At the Alamo it was my fortune to save the life of a young Mexican lad, and for that service I was spared the general massacre. I regret it but little, for when I fall, I would fall with arms in my hands, with my face to the foe, and not be slaughtered like an ox by some paltry coward who would fear to meet me in fair fight. My brave companions were cut down around me by scores, until not one remained but this faithful African who is with me, and I could only look on and witness the indiscriminate slaughter, and call on Heaven for vengeance."

"And a day of reckoning shall come!" cried the general, grasping his sword-hilt, while his nether lip trembled with indigna-

tion. "I will meet the tyrant face to face, and punish him for his sins."

"The news I bring should rally every man in Texas capable of bearing arms."

"It should; but there are important divisions among us which bring us more misfortunes than any other cause. But, thank Heaven, there are those who will follow me to battle, and do all that their country and the warmest patriotism can demand."

"Have I the honor of addressing the general-in-chief of the Texan army?"

"My name is Houston, sir."

"A name already well known to fame; but there are those who affirm that you are opposed to prosecuting an energetic war, such as the crisis requires."

"Let those who assert that I am opposed to decisive measures shoulder their guns and follow me; and he who is the first to turn back, let posterity brand him as a coward and a traitor to his country."

"I believe not all the tales I have heard. That you are a brave man, has been proved to the world. I shall keep myself advised of your movements as much as possible, and when there is fighting to be done, I shall be near you to take part in it."

"Your bold bearing, your free speech, your soiled and blood-stained garments, all assure me that you can fight. May I ask the name of one who braves death so fearlessly?"

"My name can be of little consequence to you, but it were uncourteous not to give a fitting answer. I am called Ethington; but I care not to be known, or would be known only by my deeds."

"Brave men should not give place to misanthropy, because, forsooth, the lady of their love has proved fickle or unkind. Away with melancholy, sir, for fortune seldom forsakes one not to return again."

"The advice is frankly given and well meant; but I regret to say that upon one like me, it is thrown away. I hope, in return, that you will never live to tarnish the fame which you have won, and that you may finish the bright career before you with honor unsullied by a single act of cowardice."

"The word cowardice is offensive, sir. Whatever changes time may produce, it will fail to make me a coward," said the general, contracting his brows. "You shall have war, and war to the knife. I say it—Sam Houston says it—and no man can say these lips ever uttered a falsehood."

"Texas looks to you for aid in this trying crisis, Heaven grant that she look not in vain! Adieu, general, and when next we meet, may it be where the banner of the 'Lone Star' waves triumphantly on the field of battle."

Ethington touched his cap and moved on, followed by the negro. Houston gazed after him for a moment, and then turning slowly, walked back to his party, with the sorrowful intelligence that the Alamo had fallen, and the devoted garrison was no more.

"Felix," said Ethington to his colored servant.

"Did you spoke to dis cullud gembleman, massa?" said the latter, rolling up the whites of his eyes.

"Do you know where we are?" asked Ethington.

"In course I do."

"Well, where are we?"

"In Texas, accordin' to de rules ob jography as dey manifest dereselves to de invisible senses ob dis enlightened nigger."

"Nonsense, you thick-headed fellow. I mean in what particular locality are we, Felix?"

"Now you begin to 'press yourself to de understandin' ob dis here indevidool; but I can't tell you noffin about it, 'kas I never studied de fine arts. Why didn't you ax de big cap'n wid elephants on his shoulders?"

"Epaulettes, you mean."

"What's de odds? Day all magnify de same ting, 'cordin' to de enlightened views ob dis 'telligent nigger."

"We must be near the Colorado River," added Ethington, musingly.

"Now look a-here, massa, I've got enuff ob dis fightin' bisness; and I motion dat we leave Texas and Mexico by de fust boat. Why don't you disremember dat discompassionate white gal, and go and be as you used to was?"

"Be careful how you speak of Andrea St. Aubert, Felix. Her name, in my presence, must be spoken with respect."

"She'll be de death ob dis nigger," said Felix, with a sigh. "If it hadn't been for her, you wouldn't been here in all dese scrapes, fightin' like wild cats, and I at your heels, likely to be killed at any minnit."

"I did not ask you to follow me; I gave you your choice to go or stay."

"Darfore you am to blame, for you knew dis darkey feller wouldn't leave you. Whar you go, dar dis nigger goes, and dar's no

rubbin' it out, no how you can fix it. Yah, yah! heah, heah!"

"You are a faithful fellow, Felix, and it goes against my better feelings to lead you into danger. Should you fall, I should in some measure feel that I was the cause of your death. Once more I give you permission to leave me and seek a place of safety. As for myself, I seek excitement, danger, battle and death."

"You can't be killed no how; you might as well give it up fust as last. Why wasn't you killed at the takin' of Bexar, or Goliad, and at other great fights you've been in? As for leavin' you, I have 'pressed myself fully on dat 'portant subjeck, and de natur' ob my sentiments remain de same through all changes ob de climate and wicissitudes ob de weather."

The parties rode on in silence for some distance. The sound of water was at length heard, and they soon reached the Colorado, whose banks were fringed with broad woodlands, broken into bold bluffs, or covered with grass, bordering upon prairies, and affording pasturage, where the wild mustang, the deer and the buffalo were often seen.

The horses were turned loose, and Ethington and his servant took peaceable possession of a small cabin near the river, which had evidently been occupied by some person quite recently. Felix kindled a fire, and Ethington took his rifle and went in quest of game, for neither had tasted food since the previous day.

CHAPTER II.

RIDGLEY.—OLD KENTUCK.—THE SCOUTING PARTY.—A SKIRMISH.

It will be understood by the perusal of the foregoing chapter, that our hero had met with some severe disappointment in matters pertaining to the heart, which had driven him from his home and friends, and made him a reckless wanderer in the wilds of Texas.

The particular circumstances which had led to these results shall be made known to the reader in due time. It is enough for the present purpose to say that he had been deeply enamored with a young lady by the name of Andrea St. Aubert, and for a brief period had firmly believed that his passion was reciprocated.

Miss St. Aubert was endowed with rare beauty of person, and those excellent gifts of the mind which are calculated to charm and dazzle those within the sphere of its influence. Walter Ethington was at length, as he believed, undeceived in relation to the object of his idolatry (for his love fell little short of adoration). He obtained such proofs of her inconstancy, that he felt that all was at an end between them. Addressing her a hasty note, full of reproaches for her perfidy, he left Louisiana—his native state—determined never to return, but to unite his fortunes to the Texan patriots who were struggling for their liberties, and die, like a brave man, fighting to the last.

The cup of his short-lived happiness was dashed to the earth, and he desired to live no longer. His negro servant refused to desert him, and had shared all the dangers of his reckless career since entering Texas. He had been in many engagements, fought boldly, and exposed himself rashly to the enemy; but, strange to relate, he had, miraculously, as it would almost seem, escaped death, and to crown all, had passed through the terrible tragedy of the Alamo unscathed, while over one hundred and eighty men had fallen.

Walter Ethington was about twenty-four years of age, and had been pronounced "handsome" by the ladies, who are competent judges in such matters, as every man of gallantry will allow. In figure he was rather above the medium size, straight as an arrow, firm and independent in his bearing. He was brave in battle, and his voice was the first to cheer on to the thickest of the fight. Without further description of our hero, we will proceed with our story.

Having examined his rifle to see if it were in proper order, he followed the general course of the river through a dense forest of live oak and walnut, occasionally interspersed with the ash and sycamore, pausing at intervals to watch the waters hurrying on to be discharged into the Gulf of Mexico. Emerging from the wood after half an hour's walk, he stood on the border of a small rolling prairie, green with grass and shrubbery. At that moment he saw a deer quietly browsing at the distance of about three hundred yards. Ethington was a good marksman, and though conscious that it was a long shot, resolved to fire without incurring the risk of losing the opportunity by attempting to get nearer.

He discharged his piece without loss of

time, and had the satisfaction of seeing the deer run a short distance and fall. Having reloaded his rifle, he was proceeding to take possession of his game, when the sound of paddles, dipping quickly and regularly into the water, reached his ear.

The bank of the river was but a few paces from him, but when he reached it a small boat had touched the shore, and a tall man had leaped out, leaving a lad seated upon the middle thwart. The person who had landed was probably past thirty years of age, not very fleshy, but muscular enough to indicate much physical strength. His features, though tanned by exposure, were regular, strongly marked and bold in their expression. His apparel was, of course, home-made fabric, calculated more for service than show. His cap was of skin, and though not an ornamental one, served all the purposes of the wearer. In his hand he held that indispensable attendant of the backwoodsman, a rifle. The one who still occupied the boat appeared to be a mere lad, perhaps thirteen or fourteen years, and Walter did not trouble himself to bestow much notice upon him. The man ascended the bank and approached Ethington.

"Again we meet, but I regret to see you have not profited by my advice," he said, with some coldness of manner.

"I have not; neither did I intend to," replied Walter. "Why you take the liberty to interest yourself in my affairs, I know not; but I will assure you, as I did at our first meeting, that I thank you not for your interference. By some means, Heaven knows how, you have obtained some knowledge of my past life, and have presumed to make use of it under the mask of friendship, disinterestedness, and all those fine things; but you are mistaken in your man. I know my own mind, and am pleased to follow my own inclinations."

"Headstrong boy, how long will it be ere you listen to the voice of reason? Whatever friendship I might have professed to feel for you, on the occasion of our first meeting, was *real*, and not affected, and is in nowise diminished to-day. What if you do not understand the motives which have impelled me to interest myself in your welfare? Judge me as you find me, according to my actions, and not according to your prejudices. Go back to Andrea St. Aubert, whom you have forsaken, and upon your knees beg to be forgiven and reinstated in her favor."

"Never, sir! I have sufficient proofs of her inconstancy, and to speak further upon this subject, will be to offer me a personal affront."

"Were Andrea St. Aubert to declare with her own fair lips that she had sacredly kept her faith to you, would you believe her, or would you not?" added the stranger, somewhat sternly.

"How could I believe her, sir, when I have the evidence of my own eyes? Leave me! I tell you I will hear no more. Go and give your advice to yonder beardless boy; he will, perhaps, listen to you. When I need your counsel, I will seek you out and ask you boldly; until then, do not forget that we are strangers."

Walter spoke with much energy and bitterness, and when he ceased, turned his back towards the unknown and was walking away.

"One word more before we part. You are in danger," added the man, earnestly.

"So are all men; but I have ceased to fear danger."

"But it is near—'even at the door,' to use a scriptural phrase."

"So much the better; let it come. Anything is better than monotony and inactivity."

"There are those who seek your life."

"Let them take it, for it has lost its value."

"You will not be warned?"

"I thank you not for this officiousness. Perhaps your offers are well meant; I know not, and care less. I am not in a reasonable mood, and have no desire to be otherwise. I have become indifferent to all the common affairs of life. Deceived where I trusted the most, I no longer lay myself liable to deception by trusting again. Unloved where I loved the most tenderly, I no longer bestow my love upon those who are no better, and dust and ashes, like she and myself. If I appear rude and ungrateful, you know why I am so, and have thus the reason of my ingratitude and rudeness. To warn me of danger is time lost, for it is what you term 'danger' that I seek; and if you will inform me in what direction to find it, there will I hasten to meet it, and feel a pleasure in so doing."

"The rash boldness that has signalized you in the hour of battle, has attracted the attention of the enemies of Texas, and a certain number of them, under the command of

one Garcia, a desperate fellow, have devoted themselves to the destroying of the 'Texan Bravo,' as you are styled among them," said the unknown, without heeding the remarks of Ethington.

"That suits me well," replied Walter, with a smile. "It will afford me excitement, and give me an opportunity to merit the name they have bestowed upon me. Let them come, the 'Texan Bravo' is ready; my life shall cost them a dozen of their best men. Sorrow to him who comes in range of this rifle, for these sights never cover their object in vain. And see, if they venture to close quarters, here are my pistols and bowie knife ready to receive them; while my arms have the physical power of three such cowardly fellows."

"This is sheer madness," said the stranger. "To say more is useless. I abandon you to your fate."

"Allow me to ask the name of such a disinterested friend?" added Ethington, somewhat sarcastically.

"My name is Ridgley," replied the other, who then walked thoughtfully towards the boat, pushed it from the shore, stepped in, took his seat in the stern, and paddled down the stream with the lad.

Walter looked after them a moment, and then went to take possession of his game. Cutting the choicest portions from the deer, he placed them upon his shoulders, and retraced his steps to the cabin. Felix now performed his part, and very soon they were dining upon roasted venison, which emitted a most savory odor, especially for the olfactories of a hungry man.

When Ethington had satisfied the demands of hunger, he lay down by the blazing fire and slept. He was not long permitted to enjoy this luxury uninterrupted. He was aroused from his dreams by Felix, who affirmed that he had seen a man in the vicinity of the cabin, who appeared to reconnoitre the premises without being seen. This suspicious individual, he furthermore asserted, was a Mexican, and was lurking about for no good.

Ethington endeavored to assuage the fears of his servant, telling him that his imagination, excited by the horrors he had recently witnessed, had transformed some wild animal into a Mexican scout. But in this benevolent effort, he entirely failed. Felix could by no means be induced to believe that he had made such a mistake.

Our hero now recalled the warning words of Ridgley, and resolved to watch for the appearance of the object of his servant's alarm. Having prevailed on the latter to lie down and take the rest he so much needed, Walter took his rifle, and from the crevices on either side of the cabin, commenced his vigils.

For a long time he kept his eyes on the surrounding woods without making any discoveries. This monotonous employment soon had its effect upon him; the lids fell slowly over the drowsy orbs, and he lost all consciousness of passing events. He was awakened from this happy state of somnolency by the sound of heavy footsteps. He looked up and beheld a man in buckskin breeches, short hunting-frock, moccasins, and seal-skin cap, stooping forward to enter the cabin.

"Where are you from and what is your purpose?" exclaimed Ethington, cocking his rifle.

"I was raised in old Kentuck, stranger. I'm half hoss and half alligator. I belong to one o' the smartest nations on the face o' the airth. Give us a chew of tobacco," said the intruder, in an off-hand way.

"I don't use the weed, but I believe my black fellow does," said Walter.

"Get up, Snowball," added the Kentuckian, giving Felix a push with his foot. "Get up, and shell out some Cavendish, and set the meat to roastin'. I'm as hungry as a shark."

"Did you 'dress yourself to dis collud pusson?" said Felix, rubbing his eyes in astonishment.

"Stir yourself, or I'll give you a taste of Old Kentuck." Then he added, turning to Ethington: "Stranger, have you been long in these diggins'?"

"Several months," was the reply.

"Been in any fights?"

"A few."

"Can you stand fire?"

"A little."

"Cut off a sparrow's head at three hundred yards with a rifle?"

"Never tried."

"I have, and can do it. I'm a whole team and a dog under the wagon. Did you ever hear of Texan Rangers?"

"Often, sir."

"They are perfect hosses, stranger, and I'm the alligator as commands 'em. Do you see this hollow piece of steel?" It carries

ten balls to the pound, and is certain death."

"How many does your company number?"

"Only twenty-five, now; the rest on 'em are in the chapperals and on the prairies, where they fell fighting like true sons of Kentucky."

"You and your Rangers were at the taking of San Antonio de Bexar?"

"Right, stranger; and there was warm work there, I tell you, for the place was defended by eleven hundred men. We were at the battle preceding it, at Conception Mission, and did good service. Was you at the taking of the Alamo, stranger?"

"I was, and was there also when it was lost, and witnessed the butchery of brave comrades in arms."

"You don't mean to say that the Alamo has been re-taken by the Mexicans?"

"It's too true, my brave friend, and those who fought side by side with Rangers, will hear the thunders of battle no more."

The bold ranger was speechless with surprise and grief, and uttered not a word until Ethington had given the particulars of the sad affair. He then swore by the State of Kentucky, and the "'tarnalest great Republic in the world," to avenge the death of those who had been treacherously slaughtered at Fort Alamo.

"Go yer de'th, Massa Kentuck!" exclaimed Felix, who, while cooking the venison, did not forget to listen to the conversation.

"Where is your company?" asked Walter.

"A few miles below, restin' a little after hard service."

Our hero now informed him about what Felix had seen, and the ranger advised him to have their horses brought in, to guard against their being stolen by any scouting parties of the enemy that might be lurking about the vicinity. This advice was too reasonable to be slighted. The animals were soon caught by Felix, and with the assistance of the Kentuckian, secured in a proper manner in front of the cabin.

When Ethington awoke in the morning, after a refreshing sleep, which he had very much needed, he was greatly astonished at finding a gold chain of elaborate workmanship wound lightly about his wrist, with a small piece of paper attached to it.

He recognized the ornament at once, for he had in happier days given it to Andrea St. Aubert. But how came it in its present situation? By what magic had it been returned to him? Perhaps the paper would tell. He hastened to examine it, and found only the following words traced in the fair hand of Andrea:—

"This chain once possessed inestimable value for one, but now has lost its worth, and I restore it to the original owner."

This was all the paper contained, and there was no signature; but the chirography could not be mistaken. As Ethington gazed at the chain, the past was recalled with such vividness, that he found it exceedingly difficult to govern his emotions. He heard once more, in imagination, the soft voice of Andrea, beheld her face in its dazzling beauty, and her figure in its exquisite grace. He shed tears as he thought of her loveliness, both of person and of mind, and grew indignant as he remembered her inconstancy.

"O Andrea!" he exclaimed, "fair, but false; may Heaven forgive you for the anguish you have caused me."

Ethington's thoughts naturally led him to consider by what singular means the chain and note had been returned; but upon that interesting point he was obliged to content himself with mere conjecture. He finally settled down into the opinion, which appeared most reasonable, that Andrea had employed some person to restore the ornament, and that person had faithfully performed the commission. Walter would have pondered upon the subject all day, most probably, had not Captain Wilson, the ranger, who had left the cabin at sunrise, now returned with the information that a scouting party of the enemy, numbering some ten or fifteen persons, was in the neighborhood. He had approached the spot where they had passed the night, and discovered them engaged in preparing and eating their morning meal.

"If I'd had but half a dozen rangers with me," said Wilson, looking wistfully at his rifle, "but few of 'em would have escaped to eat another breakfast."

"Have the enemy ever ventured so far as this, before?" asked Ethington.

"Seldom or never; but they are gittin' uncommonly bold, now. The affair of the Alamo gives the tarnal critters the idea that they've conquered all the country; but they will find themselves mistaken when they get a fair specimen of Kentucky sharp-shootin'. What do you say to having a brush with the rascals?"

"Nothing could be more agreable," replied Walter, "for I have reason to suppose that I am the object of their pursuit. I have been told that some of our enemies have taken particular offence at my mode of fighting, and have sworn to accomplish my death."

"Then you are the hoss they call the Texan Bravo?" rejoined the ranger, quickly.

"I believe I am thus called," answered Walter; "but it is a title I never coveted, for I have not, and do not seek notoriety. I wish to remain unknown, and such has been my desire since I passed the boundary of my native State.

"I've heard about your fightin'," said Wilson, "and there is a great deal of wild hoss in you, with a sprinklin' of the Kentucky alligator and snappin'-turtle."

"Yah, yah! heah, heah! What a querious speciment ob human natur'!" exclaimed Felix, displaying two rows of ivory.

"In what way do you propose to fight this scouting party, Captain Wilson?" asked Walter.

"I will tell you the plan I have thought of: you and I will mount the two hosses and ride near enough to attract their attention, and then ride from them as though for dear life. Thinking we are frightened, they will mount and pursue us pell-mell. We will make a break directly for the cabin, take our hosses inside, shut the door, and then shoot them down through the crevices as fast as they show their heads."

"The scheme pleases me; let us hasten to put it in execution."

"Go it, massa debbil!" muttered Felix, not greatly elated at the prospect of a hard fight.

"But first let us see if we can get our horses inside this door," added Walter.

Upon trial the door was found large enough to admit the horses without difficulty. The two then mounted, and rifle in hand, rode off, the ranger leading the way. A ride of ten minutes brought them within a few hundred yards of the scouting party. Turning a little towards the prairie on the right, they came suddenly in sight of the enemy, who set up a great shout, and sprang instantly on their mustangs, which were standing saddled and bridled near them. Ethington and Wilson now fled, as had been agreed upon, and thereupon ensued a scampering and scattering of the wildest and most exciting kind. They put their mustangs to their best speed, and a dozen escopetas were discharged in as many seconds; but the balls fell short, or whistled harmlessly by the pursued.

"Hurrah for old Kentuck!" cried the ranger, and slackening his speed, brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired. A stout fellow tumbled from his seat, and the riderless mustang, not knowing what else to do, kept on with the rest, and being relieved of his burden, made the best way of any. Ethington, not wishing to be outdone by the "alligator from Kentucky," followed his example with equal success.

These feats greatly enraged their pursuers. They yelled with redoubled energy, and urged on their mustangs with new zeal; but the large, fine animals ridden by Walter and the captain easily kept out of range of the escopetas. In order to prolong the sport (for such they considered it), they diverged considerably from a direct course to the cabin, and they now saw with some alarm, that several of their enemies were making directly for the place of their retreat, apparently for the purpose of cutting them off, which event would leave them only the alternative of trusting to the fleetness of their horses, and throw Felix into their power.

Both of our friends saw the importance of frustrating this design, lest the negro should pay the penalty of their rashness with his life,—a calamity which Ethington would have greatly regretted, and a poor reward for the fidelity which had induced him to follow his unhappy master into the swamps, chapparels and prairies of Texas. to urge war upon a people destitute of honor and humanity.

"Let us charge through the foremost of the cowardly curs!" cried Ethington. Turning the heads of their powerful horses in another direction, slinging their rifles upon their backs, and grasping their pistols, they bore down upon the Mexicans at an increased speed. This sudden manœuvre took them by surprise, as they had not supposed it possible that two men could have the audacity to charge a dozen.

Before they had time to reflect much upon the subject, Ethington and the ranger were in their midst, overturning several of their small mustangs by the violence of the charge. Firing their pistols at the nearest, they dashed on without a wound or scratch, and in three minutes from that time were safely in the cabin, much to the satisfaction of Felix, who had heard the screaming and

yelling of the enemy, and expected every moment to see them thundering up to the door. The horses were led in, the door barricaded in a proper manner, and other preparations for defence made. These necessary preliminaries were scarcely accomplished, when the enemy came in sight, upon the most open side of the little fort—that which bordered upon a small prairie or tract of pasture land. They halted about two hundred yards from the cabin, and appeared to be holding a council of war.

"See the tarnal critters!" exclaimed Wilson, angrily; "huddled together like a flock o' sheep. If they were Kentuckians or Texans, we shouldn't stand no chance at all of our lives; for they'd pull this log hut down about our ears in a twinklin'. Let's give 'em a touch of American shooting."

"Go it, Massa Kentuck!" cried Felix, getting somewhat excited with the idea of knocking a Mexican out of his saddle, without giving him time enough to say an *ave*, or a *pater noster*. Their rifles were thrust carefully through the crevices which were to serve as port holes. The Mexicans were busily engaged in talking, shouting and gesticulating.

"They are calling upon us to surrender," said the ranger, with a laugh. "And hear them; they are promising us good usage."

"Hadn't we better surrender?" said Walter, gravely, looking at Felix.

"We got enuff ob dat!" replied Felix, with a dismal shake of the head. "Dis nigger's going to fight."

"Look through your sights," cried the ranger. "Each pick his man, and fire."

No sooner said than executed. The rifles cracked simultaneously; two of them fell from their saddles, and a third gave evidence of being badly, if not mortally wounded. He was lifted from his horse, carried further from the cabin and laid upon the grass. The enemy now retreated about a hundred yards, brandishing their weapons, and uttering all kinds of imprecations upon our heros.

Their courage now seemed to revive a little; they galloped furiously towards the Texans, and discharged their escopetas against the logs, shouting bravely, and scampered back to their last position—out of rifle range, as they flattered themselves. The balls showered harmlessly upon the cabin, doing no other injury than making the splinters fly merrily, and frightening their horses.

"I wish we could pick off their leader," said Wilson. "The rest of them would then go about their business."

"That will be difficult, for the one who appears to be the leader, keeps himself covered by his men," replied Walter.

Again the deadly rifles were leveled, and sent forth their leaden messengers with unerring certainty. Astonished beyond description by this specimen of Texan markmanship, the scouting party wheeled their horses to the right-about face, and were soon beyond the reach of fire-arms.

Walter, with reckless courage which had characterized all his movements since he had led that singular life, proposed that they should mount their horses and pursue the retreating party; but this rash movement was opposed by Wilson and Felix,—particularly by the latter, who felt anxious for his own safety as well as that of his master,—consequently the idea was abandoned.

CHAPTER III.

A RUSE DE GUERRE.—THE CONFLICT RENEWED.

In a short time several of the enemy appeared, bearing a white flag; and not daring to venture very near, by screaming and hallooing, signified that they wished to carry off their dead and wounded. This they were permitted to do without interruption; but the business appeared to proceed very slowly, and they returned several times, when it might reasonably have been supposed they could have accomplished the task in less than half the time.

Supposing the fight was ended, Felix began to unbar the door, under the impression that further precaution was unnecessary. He had scarcely removed the fastenings, when there was a sudden rush from the woods upon the rear of the cabin, and renewed shouting and firing. While the others had been attracting the attention of Ethington and his comrades, these had been advancing cautiously on foot in another direction, and now threw themselves against the door with a violence that burst it open instantly. The two foremost fell dead upon the threshold before the rifles of Walter and the ranger, and the head of a third was dashed in pieces by a tremendous blow from Felix.

The *ruse* having proved successful, those who had been ostensibly engaged in carry-

ing away the wounded, now came running to the assistance of their companions, and a most desperate and bloody conflict immediately ensued. The numbers of the enemy had not been correctly estimated; for, notwithstanding those that they had lost, and those rendered incapable of fighting by their wounds, there were still eleven to contend with our gallant fellows.

"Strike home!" cried Ethington.

"Hurra for old Kentuck!" exclaimed Wilson. "Give it to the tarnal critters."

"Go yer de'th, massa dibbil!" yelled Felix, exerting his immense strength in a manner which defied all opposition, and forced the enemy to give ground inch by inch, leaving several of their numbers *hors du combat*, and some who would never fight again. As there was not room enough in the cabin for them to use their rifles with sufficient effect, they were thrown aside, and that fatal weapon drawn, so well known in the south and south-west,—the bowie-knife,—and the work of slaughter commenced in earnest.

It was fortunate for our heroes that all the enemy could not enter and fall upon them at once; otherwise the conflict might have soon been brought to a close. The horses, frightened at the struggle going on about them, became restive, reared and plunged, and finally broke through the Mexicans, who were forcing themselves in at the door, and gained the open air, leaving more room for the fight to go on.

This sudden movement of the beast somewhat disconcerted the enemy, but soon proved for their advantage; in a moment after, Ethington and his friends were completely hemmed in, and there seemed but little prospect of their coming out of the melee alive. Each did his best, and with the much dreaded bowie-knife, dealt those deadly thrusts which tell so fearfully upon the body of an adversary, and which baffle so effectually the skill of the surgeon.

But the strongest arm is not iron, and must feel at length the weariness consequent upon long exertion; and it grew evident that a conflict so unequal could not last much longer. The Mexicans became more cautious as their numbers decreased, and though they fought desperately, observed more prudence in their assaults. Felix and an athletic fellow had grappled with each other in an embrace which was to yield only to the embrace of death, on one side or the other, and were now upon the ground, struggling with all the fury of mortal hate. They rolled over and over, writhed, twisted, and mutually strained every nerve, while two or three of the enemy stood with uplifted swords to put an end to the conflict when an opportunity should offer; but the evolutions of the combatants were so rapid, that they could not strike without danger to their friend.

At length the strong hand of Felix reached its way to his adversary's throat, and closed upon it with all its muscular force. The effect was instantaneous; the arms of the Mexican relaxed their hold, his face grew purple, his limbs straightened out, and the next moment the knife of the African was sheathed in his heart. The conquerer cast the body from him, arose with a triumphant shout engaged with two more with unabated ferocity and energy; for his frame seemed proof against that exhaustion which his master and the Kentuckian began to feel.

At that critical juncture, when the fate of the day hung doubtful, a new shout was suddenly heard to mingle with the confused sounds of the fight, a voice clear as the tones of a silver trumpet, and fiercer than the neigh of a war-horse. Ethington glanced towards the door, and beheld the towering form of Ridgley dashing aside the enemy, as if they were children in his way.

"There's for the death of Travis, Crockett, and Bowie!" he cried, dealing a blow with a good sized hunting-axe, which he wielded with ease with his right hand at the mention of each name. The fighting instantly ceased, and those who could do so, fled without loss of time. Six of the eleven were left behind, affording ample proof of Texan prowess.

"Up and away!" cried Ridgley. "There is not a moment to lose. Santa Anna, at the head of five thousand men, is marching towards Harrisburgh. The van of the army is already within an hour's march. If you would fight for Texas, join General Houston without delay.

"Are you sure the blanketed critters are comin'?" asked Wilson, eagerly, who with Walter and the negro had sunk down exhausted, after the fight.

"Yes, I am sure; and a few days will decide the fate of the 'Lone Star,'" replied Ridgley.

"Not if they had many such horses as you are," added the ranger. "There's a

quantity of the alligator and snappin' turtle about you, with a wholesome sprinklin' of Kentucky catamounts. Shouldn't wonder if you was raised in them parts?"

Ridgley made no answer to the complimentary speeches of Wilson. Ethington would gladly have asked the former if he had any knowledge of the means whereby the chain had been returned, but his pride kept him silent upon the subject. With a cold and formal bow to our hero, Ridgley departed as abruptly as he appeared. Ethington, notwithstanding the service the stranger had rendered him, felt relieved when he had gone, for he feared he would again recur to Andrea, the object of his unhappy passion, and the cause of his leading a life so wild and erratic. He dared not trust himself to hear a name mentioned which he could not deny was still dear to him, lest it might revive and add new strength to a sentiment which he had sworn to conquer, though he could not hope to forget.

It was with feelings of peculiar bitterness that he beheld once more the man who had boldly accused him of baseness in connection with Miss St. Aubert. Whether he was a real friend, he had not yet decided; but that he was brave, he could no longer doubt, for he had now seen him fight with heroic courage. Walter had apprehended that Ridgley would take advantage of the service he had rendered, to speak to him again in relation to the subject of their two previous interviews; and he was agreeably disappointed when he saw him turn and walk towards the river, with his long rifle upon his shoulder. Though still much exhausted, and smarting from the pain of several slight wounds, he could not resist the desire to watch him, and see which way he directed his footsteps. He arose and followed him slowly to the bank of the Colorado, and observed his movements. He saw him step into a boat, and paddle to the opposite bank; he then leaped out without loss of time. As soon as his feet touched the shore, he saw the lad who had accompanied him on the occasion of their second interview emerging from a thicket of willows. Upon closer scrutiny, Ethington perceived two horses standing there. Ridgley led them forth, assisted the youth to mount, leaped upon the other animal himself, and in a moment the party was lost to view. Walter joined his comrades, more thoughtful than usual, even for him.

Felix had caught the horses, and was awaiting his master's re-appearance, in order to depart.

"Now," said Wilson, "I will lead the way, and in a few hours we will be with the Rangers. The ground is rather rough and broken, and I can go as fast on foot as you can safely travel on horseback."

Ethington agreed to this arrangement, and they set forward down the river. When they reached Bastrop, they found that the Rangers had already passed over, and were awaiting Captain Wilson on the opposite side. They were a fine company of men, well mounted and accoutred, and were nothing daunted by the news of the hostile movements of the enemy. With three cheers for the "Lone Star," they vaulted into their saddles, and were soon in motion. Before night set in, they joined the forces of Houston, who was marching towards Harrisburg to intercept the enemy and offer them battle.

The country was now completely alarmed, and women and children were leaving their hitherto peaceful homes to seek safety in some other quarter. To add to the misfortunes of the times, the Convention had adjourned with the greatest precipitation from Washington to Harrisburg, in order to secure their own safety; or possibly because they believed it their duty to do so, that the only semblance of a government in Texas might not fall into the hands of the dictator. Be this as it may, the flight of the Convention greatly increased the dangers of that period, inasmuch as it weakened the confidence of the people, and prevented the gathering of reinforcements for the army.

Elated by their recent victories, the enemy were advancing in three columns to crush forever the hopes of the young republic. The centre was led by Santa Anna in person, from San Antonio de Bexar, intending to pass through Gonzales, San Felipe and Washington, on his route to Nacadoches. The other two columns, under Urrea and Gaono, were marching forward by different routes, to effect a junction of their forces at the Comanche crossing, at Trinity River.

Santa Anna, hearing that the Convention had adjourned to Harrisburg, changed his plans somewhat, and marched directly for that place, with a view to the capture of the new government. The Texan army now numbered only about five hundred and twenty men, but was increased to seven

hundred strong by the time they reached San Jacinto. Previous to that event, they had received the disheartening news that Fannin and his men had been inhumanly massacred at Goliad. This piece of information the general affected to treat with great contempt, and assured his little band that it was a fabrication of the enemy, in order to frighten them into submission; although he entertained no doubt in regard to the authenticity of the report.

This policy on the part of Houston proved of great advantage, inasmuch as it prevented desertions among the men—an inevitable result, had the astounding news been allowed to spread through the camp uncontradicted. The general did not reach Harrisburg until it had been reduced to ashes by Santa Anna. The army halted near the smoking ruins, and looked upon them with stern and threatening visages.

"Look!" said Houston, to our hero; "see the work of the tyrant and the assassin. What man is there among us who will not fight, after beholding such a spectacle?"

"He is a craven indeed who will not fight for his liberty, his wife, his children, or his sweetheart," replied Ethington.

"We are but a handful," returned the general; "but we will meet the enemy and conquer, or never leave the field alive. I will give yonder brave fellows the battle-cry which shall endow the arms of each with the strength of three of his adversaries. Let those who love Texas follow me in the approaching fight, and if I shrink or falter in my duty, may Heaven punish me upon the spot by the ignoble death I should so richly merit."

"The man who fought so daringly at the Horse Shoe, cannot be justly suspected of cowardice or want of decision," answered Walter.

"Without stooping to flattery," said the general, with a smile, "I can well afford to repay the generous compliment; for the bold deeds of the Texan Bravo are well known to me. I feel assured that you will set the men an example that will contribute to the success of our arms. But," added Houston, in a friendly tone, "I learn with regret that some dark spirit of misanthropy has settled upon you; and in fact, that you are weary of existence. This is not as it should be. A brave and chivalrous young fellow like you, should rise above disappointment, and be able to look misfortune in the face."

"I thank you, general, for your kind words and benevolent intentions, and I will only say in reply, that in the hour of battle, you will find me at my post."

"I doubt it not, sir," replied the general, kindly.

"There's a great deal of wild hoss in him, with a choice sprinklin' of the alligator and snappin' turtle," remarked Captain Wilson, who joined them at that moment.

"We shall soon need all those excellent qualities," said Houston, good-naturedly. "I will answer for him and the rangers."

"When you march us up to face the enemy, general, the voice of Old Kentuck will be heard the loudest in the fight," rejoined Wilson, earnestly.

"'Spress yerself!" exclaimed Felix, exhibiting a choice collection of ivory.

"Be silent!" said Ethington.

"Can he fight?" asked Houston, regarding the athletic frame of Felix with evident admiration.

"There isn't a better man among us when it comes to blows," replied Walter.

"Heah, heah!" or something of that nature was heard to escape the lips of the African.

"He's capable of eating three Mexicans at a meal without butter or salt," observed the captain of the Rangers.

"Promulgate—go yer de'th, Massa Kentuck," added Felix. "Allow your idees to become luminous. Heah, heah!"

After some further conversation, the general gave orders for the army to supply itself with three days' rations. This requisition having been complied with, the defenders of the "Lone Star" crossed Bayou Buffalo, and prepared to give battle to the enemy. Santa Anna was advancing to cross the San Jacinto, and Houston took up a position in a copse, determined to dispute further progress.

The enemy approached and opened upon them with a brass twelve pounder; but their fire was silenced by two six pounders (the only field pieces with which the Texans had been supplied), which succeeded in turning the Mexican infantry, forcing it to take shelter in a heavy growth of wood.

Failing to bring on a general engagement, as he had intended, Santa Anna fell back about fifteen hundred yards, and began to strengthen his position by erecting fortifications near the bay of San Jacinto. Many of the Texan officers were in favor of giving

battle without delay; but the cool head of Houston overruled this premature movement, and another sun was destined to set and rise on the yet bloodless field of San Jacinto.

CHAPTER IV.

WIKOFF.—A CHALLENGE.—MARIANNA.—A RIVAL.

THE defenders of Texas rested upon their arms. When the sun went down, and for some time after, the enemy's twelve pounder thundered upon their position, awaking the echoes of the adjacent hills and woodlands; while the balls spent their fury upon the sheltering trees, splintering their trunks and lopping off their boughs.

After doubling the guard and taking all the precautions which a soldier of his experience thought necessary to prevent a surprise, the general-in-chief wrapped himself in his military cloak, placed his saddle for a pillow, and feeling that he had done all that duty required, slept the warrior's sleep, undisturbed by the random shots of the enemy, dreaming of victory on the morrow.

The gentle moon rode up into the starry skies, and the goddess of silence waved her misty wings over both armies. Walter Ethington felt but little inclination to sleep. Seated upon one of the field pieces, he had kept his eyes fixed dreamily upon the dull camp fires of the hostile troops. The steady tread of the sentinels, the dissonant ringing of arms, and sometimes the hum of voices, were borne to his ears upon the whispering winds from the enemy's bivouac. Ethington's thoughts were not engaged with those objects upon which his attention was apparently fixed. Andrea St. Aubert, with all those advantages of mind and person which had made him her humble worshipper in days that were gone, was once more the subject of his meditations.

Grieved and disappointed as he had been by what appeared to him her heartless perfidy, he could not deny that she was still dear to him, and that he had often found himself dwelling with strange fondness (or infatuation) upon the past. He mechanically drew from his pocket the chain which had been so mysteriously restored to his possession. He sighed heavily as his eyes wandered over the shining links, for he remembered the evening when he had playfully thrown it over the snowy neck of Andrea. While he held the chain in his hand, and was occupied with the reflections, a hand was laid lightly upon his shoulder.

Ethington turned sharply towards the intruder.

"It has been told me that you are weary of life," said the stranger, abruptly.

"Excuse me," replied Walter, coldly, "I have not the honor of your acquaintance."

"You shall not long labor under that disadvantage," replied the other. "It is very possible that you have never heard my name mentioned; but it is probable, should you survive this night and the next twenty-four hours, you will never forget me during your life. My name is Wikoff."

"Well, sir, what is that to me?" said Ethington, impatiently.

"I am the lover of Andrea St. Aubert, consequently your rival; and I am happy to add, your favored rival," rejoined Wikoff, bowing profoundly.

"I regret that she has made so poor a choice," retorted Ethington, calmly.

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Wikoff, sneeringly.

"All I have to say here; but cross yonder hedge with me, and I will speak to you in another way," said Ethington, with difficulty restraining the deep resentment which the stranger's insulting words and manner had awakened.

"Swords, pistols, or rifles?" asked Wikoff.

"Either," replied Walter. "I am wholly indifferent as to weapons."

"We will try pistols, then."

"Very well."

"And the time?"

"The sooner the better, for I am impatient to punish your insolence. No man has yet dared to speak the name of Andrea St. Aubert in the manner you have presumed to speak it to-night. That you are some worthless adventurer I doubt not; but I will meet you, and perhaps chastise your arrogance, and tame your presumption."

"Let it be to-morrow night, if you survive the approaching conflict." Wikoff laid particular stress upon the last words of the sentence, and then added, with a sinister smile, "It were a pity to rob you of the glory of the anticipated fight! I should always regret it, I assure you. After the battle, meet me on the bank of yonder river, near that cluster of live oaks, with or with-

out a friend, just as you choose. There is a delightful plat of grass there, and a fall upon it would not be likely to break your bones, and may form a very easy couch for you to close up the last accounts of life upon."

"Of all times this would suit me best," said Ethington. "The moon, aided by the stars, sheds light enough for the purpose, and nothing can be gained by wasting time. However, I accede to your terms, for to-morrow I would fight for the 'Lone Star,' and a wound, even from an insolent adventurer, might prevent me from assisting in a struggle where every arm is needed."

"Remember the place of meeting, for I would not lose the opportunity of punishing you for having at one time in your life laid claim to the hand of Miss St. Aubert; a piece of presumption I can never pardon."

Ethington's blood boiled with indignation, and he partly raised his hand to strike down the intruder; but mastering his feelings with a powerful effort, he turned his back upon Wikoff and walked from him. An insulting laugh followed our hero, and worked up his fury to such an extent, that he was about to retrace his steps, and chastise the offender on the spot; but upon looking in the direction where he had left him he had disappeared.

Here was another wonderful link in the chain of mystery which had been recently cast about the career of Ethington. The motives and actions of Ridgley he could not understand; and the singular audacity and malignity of the new-comer, Wikoff, were quite as inexplicable. The last adventure furnished new food for reflection, and he was endeavoring to mentally digest the same, when Captain Wilson joined him.

"I have been looking for you," said the ranger. "I wanted to have some confidential talk with you, and perhaps ask your advice and assistance."

"Very well, captain, I am at your service; you have only to command me," replied Ethington.

"Mr. Ethington, I am an honest Kentuckian, although somewhat rude and bearish, no doubt; but I will be frank with you, and come to the subject uppermost in my thoughts at once. About two miles beyond Vince's Bridge, there is a neat farm-house, owned and occupied by a man of the name of Lee, who some years ago married a fair Mexican woman, and has now a son grown to manhood, and a daughter of about seventeen. Marianna is one of those bewitching girls that must be seen in order to be appreciated. Such dark languishing eyes, and such a figure! Why, it equals Old Kentuck; and that's saying a great deal. Two glances, sir, from the dazzling orbs of Marianna have done more for me than all the escopetas of the Mexican army; for they have inflicted wounds of such a nature as can't be healed by the common treatment of gunshot wounds. The Mexican women are very pretty, sir, notwithstanding the men are such villanous fellows; and Marianna has just enough Mexican style of beauty to make her one of the most enchanting girls living."

"I would advise you to surrender at discretion, Captain Wilson," said Ethington.

"I certainly would, if I thought I could make honorable terms; but there's the rub."

"You have made love to her, doubtless."

"The word hasn't ever been mentioned between us, sir. If I have made love at all, it has been done with my eyes, for I hadn't dare open my lips on the subject. I can face the enemy and give 'em a taste of Kentucky skill, but I have never been able to tell Marianna Lee that I love her; the very thought of it makes the perspiration stand in drops on my forehead, and excites me more than did the storming of Bexar, when only two hundred of us fought our way from house to house and whipped eleven hundred of the enemy. But what I wish to say is this: if we should be beaten to-morrow, the robbers of Santa Anna will overrun the whole country, sparing neither age nor sex; and Lee who has thus far refused to move an inch, will be among the first to suffer. I have made up my mind to cross Vince's Bridge, and warn Lee of the danger that threatens, and endeavor to fix upon some means of giving them early intelligence of the battle."

"The idea is a benevolent one, and if you will permit me, I will accompany you."

"That is the favor I was about to ask," answered the ranger; "but you have anticipated the request."

Arming themselves thoroughly, Ethington and the captain left the bivouac, and directed their footsteps towards Vince's Bridge, which both armies had passed over in order to attain their present position. They crossed it without interruption, and silently pursued their way towards the residence of Marianna Lee—the maiden whose gentle

witchery had cast a spell over the senses of the daring Kentuckian.

They traversed a few half-cultivated fields, skirted by flourishing woodlands, and after various turnings and windings, and penetrating a thick growth of hickory, emerged into a large clearing, upon the farther side of which, just under the shelter of some tall chestnut trees, stood the house of Mr. Lee.

As they approached it, they were astonished at hearing a confused hum of voices proceeding from within. Advancing more cautiously, the ranger took the liberty to reconnoitre the interior as much as practicable through the windows. Fortunately for his purpose, a curtain had been imperfectly drawn, and he had ample opportunity for gratifying a pardonable curiosity.

A scene met his view which, as he expressed it, "riled up his Kentucky blood." Four Mexicans, either deserters from the enemy, or banditti which had followed in the wake of the victorious army, were cosily seated beneath the hospitable roof of Mr. Lee, eating and drinking his good things, and having matters pretty much their own way. The master of the house sat with folded arms and sullen brow, a few yards from his unwelcome guests; while his wife and Marianna, with pale and anxious faces, strove to entertain them and not give cause for offence. They called vociferously for *aguardiente*, and when it was furnished them, drank more deeply, and grew more insolent.

Presently, the most jauntily dressed of the four seated himself face to face with Marianna, evidently anticipating a pleasant time; while another cried out in an insolent tone, "I want a glass of brandy." Mr. Lee informed him that there was no more in the house, which put him in a violent passion, and set him to fingering the handle of his dagger in a very threatening manner.

Meantime the gallant who had drawn his chair in front of Marianna, began to say fine things to her *a la Espanola* (in Spanish fashion), which so far from proving agreeable, annoyed and terrified her excessively. She arose to leave him, but he insisted that she should remain where she was. To crown his politeness, the cabellero insisted that his timid companion should smoke a cigaretta; that the ladies of his country smoked; that such lips seemed made in vain, unless they held a roll of the fragrant weed.

It was in vain that Marianna protested that she held cigarettas in abhorence; the courteous senor lighted one for himself and another for her, and puffed out stifling volumes of smoke, which nearly choked her.

She threw the vile cigaretta from her in disgust, and with tears gathering in her bright eyes, begged to be excused, which the gentleman offered to do conditionally. Inasmuch as the cigaretta was obnoxious to her lips, she would have no objection to receiving a salute upon them from so proper a person as himself.

This proposition alarmed her more than the former, and raised the ire of her father to a pitch which he could no longer restrain.

"Ruffian!" he exclaimed, starting from his seat, "desist, or I will strangle you on the spot!" And then he added, fixing his flashing eyes upon his guests: "I have had enough of this, cabelleros. I am master in my own house, and I order you to leave it without delay!"

The rascals had only been waiting for some pretence for a quarrel, for the last half-hour, and this decided language now afforded a good one. They sprang up, drew their daggers, and made a furious attack upon their host. Their first Mexican oaths were scarcely uttered, when the door burst open, and Ethington and the ranger rushed in upon them. Lee had already prostrated one of the ruffians with a blow of his fist, and when our two friends made their unexpected entry, the others ceased offensive operations at once, not a little nonplussed and confounded at the appearance of two such formidable looking *Americanos*.

"Down with them," shouted Wilson, and being ably seconded by Ethington, the *valiantes* were soon hurled upon the floor, with no other wounds than those inflicted by the clenched hand.

"What shall be done with them now?" asked Ethington.

Wilson made a motion towards his pistols; but Lee shook his head, saying that in his opinion such a procedure would be unnecessary, as they would probably go their way peaceably, if permitted, and doubtless, never trouble them again.

"I can't forget the Alamo," replied the ranger, "and if we shouldn't whip the scoundrels to-morrow, you'll be pretty sure to have more trouble with these senors; but if you say let them go, I won't object, though greater villains never escaped their just deserts."

The discomfited dons were allowed to get upon their feet, and were respectively kicked into the open air by Wilson, who appeared to take great pleasure in the exercise; and Ethington observed the fellow who attempted to make Marianna smoke a cigar, received a double portion of punishment.

When quietness was somewhat restored, our hero had an opportunity to observe the object of the ranger's passion at his leisure, and was glad to see that her charms had not been overrated by him; and in fact, he soon came to the conclusion that her personal advantages far exceeded the captain's description. Her symmetrical figure, neither too short nor too tall, not lacking in *embonpoint*, nor yet so plethoric as to be wanting in elegance, her graceful carriage, her handsome, oval face, and above all, her dark and eloquent eyes, made Ethington think of Andrea St. Aubert.

The pallidness produced by her recent terrors, had given place to a slight flush resembling the ruddiest carnation of a blush, which rather enhanced her beauty than otherwise. The ceremony of introduction to the father, mother and daughter was gone through with, and the latter, though evidently embarrassed, was soon led into an agreeable conversation; while the captain, so valiant in the hour of danger, had suddenly become as silent as a bashful maiden. Strange are the doings of the winged little boy with the bow in his hand and the quiver of arrows at his back.

Mrs. Lee was still in the prime of life, and enough of beauty yet remained to show that the daughter was fairly entitled to hers. The son, James, they were informed, had started that very evening to join the forces of Houston, and Mrs. Lee bespoke the kindly offices of the ranger, should her boy be wounded while contending for the liberty of Texas. Wilson felt himself but too happy to promise all that she could desire, and a grateful look from Marianna more than rewarded him for his protestations, and caused the tell-tale blood to mount precipitately to his sun-burnt cheeks.

As the evening advanced, the captain got the better of his timidity in some measure, and ventured to make a few commonplace remarks to Marianna, who replied so courteously that he was highly delighted.

Matters were progressing thus pleasantly when there was a new arrival, which marred all the captain's pleasure, and caused a deep frown to appear upon his usually open brow. The last comer was a man about Wilson's age and size; but possessing none of his frankness of character, and but a small share of his manliness and good looks.

He was introduced as Mr. Cogswell. Ethington noticed that the two exchanged glances which were anything but friendly; and it was quickly apparent to him, that in the person of a stranger, the ranger had a rival whom he held in mortal aversion, which was amply reciprocated by the former.

Immediately the cheerfulness of Marianna disappeared, and all parties felt embarrassed and ill at ease, save the new-comer, who with a careless "good-evening," seated himself as near the young lady as possible, and began to converse with a freedom that was quite provoking to the Kentuckian. With an easy and off-hand manner, he talked of every subject of interest, favoring the ranger with many contemptuous glances and cutting innuendoes.

"Do you vegetate in these parts, stranger?" he asked, at length, addressing himself to Wilson.

"I calculate I don't," replied the latter.

"Belong to the army, perhaps?"

"Perhaps I do," rejoined Wilson, drily. "Every brave man goes to the field to fight for his rights. I take it that you don't belong to the army, Mr. *Cogshell?*" added the ranger, emphasizing the name, which he designedly pronounced wrong.

"My name is Cogswell—and I do not belong to the army. The ranks are so full of vagabonds and ragamuffins, that it's no place for a gentleman," replied Cogswell.

"If the Texan army is composed of such materials as you mention, stranger, I should think it would be the very place for you," said the ranger, eyeing Cogswell savagely.

"I fight on my own hook," rejoined the other.

"If you'll jest take your hook and come with me, I'll give you a specimen of Old Kentuck that'll make you see stars and other heavenly bodies," added Wilson.

"Remember there are ladies present," interposed Ethington.

"And the fairest the 'Lone Star,' can boast of," said the ranger with a desperate effort.

Cogswell frowned more darkly than ever, and darted a furious look at the captain. Marianna was much agitated, and looked imploringly at Ethington.

"We will have no quarreling, gentlemen, if you please," said Mr. Lee. Obedient to a gesture from the latter, Marianna arose and left the room, while Cogswell sat glaring at the Kentuckian like some half-tamed animal escaped from his keepers. Bending toward Wilson, he said, in a low and determined voice:—

"This is no place for you. The man who comes here to see the bright eyes of Marianna, will have to deal with Tim Cogswell!"

"And do you think to frighten an alligator from Old Kentuck with such silly bravado?" replied Wilson, in the same tone. "If you have anything of that kind to say, meet me with the rifle or bowie-knife, and settle it like a man. There are plenty of places hereabouts where such a thing can be done in a quiet business sort of a way. And perhaps, come to think on it, the affair might as well be arranged now as any time. We crossed a field, not a great distance from here, which would be just the thing. I see you've got your shootin' iron with you; suppose you take it and follow me. If you should pop me over, my lieutenant would be promoted, and there would be one Kentucky lad the less, and I shouldn't be standin' in anybody's way. On the other hand, if you should be sped, why, it's my candid opinion nobody would be sorry, and Marianna Lee wouldn't trouble herself to shed a single tear for you."

"When I fight," replied Cogswell, coloring, "it shall be in the daytime, and with friends present to see fair play. One thing is certain; you will hear from me sooner than will prove agreeable. I am your enemy to the death, and as such, we will meet again."

With a low, insulting laugh, Cogswell arose and left the house.

"He fears the Kentucky rifle," said Ethington.

"He's a coward, or he wouldn't have refused such an offer," replied the ranger.

The conversation now took a more agreeable turn, and Mr. Lee earnestly strove to make his visitors forget the unpleasant incident which had just occurred. Promising to give him the earliest intelligence of the fate of the battle, our two friends departed, and directed their footsteps towards the Texan bivouac. The camp fires had gone out. A deep silence rested upon the motionless figures of the weary soldiers, broken only by the slow tread of the sentinels who kept sleepless vigils over those who were to decide the fate of the "Lone Star" so soon.

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO.

THE sun of the twentieth of April arose with undimmed splendor, and his beams were reflected brightly from the burnished arms of the hostile enemy. The general-in-chief was already in the saddle, and the banner of the "Lone Star" was floating proudly and defiantly in the morning breezes, and the columns of Texans were forming in the order of battle.

While these stirring scenes were progressing, Houston was seen conferring with a well-known personage, who passed in camp by the name of Deaf Smith—a man with a brave heart, a strong hand, and willing to execute the commands of his superior officer, even to death. In a moment after, Ethington saw Smith with two polished axes standing at a little distance from the fast filling ranks, with eyes fixed steadily upon the general as if awaiting some important order.

"Are you going to fight with two axes?" asked Wilson, somewhat sarcastically, as he passed him.

But Deaf Smith heeded him not; for there was only one voice that could arouse his warlike spirit, and set his stout limbs in motion.

The defenders of Texas were under arms, impatient for the enemy to advance; but all was quiet within the Mexican lines, and they showed no disposition to come to an engagement. The general consulted with his officers on the expediency of attacking the enemy. Four of the six field officers who constituted the council, opposed the idea of an attack with all their power, representing that the great disparity of numbers, the advantages of the enemy's position, and his superior discipline, rendered the measure too hazardous to be thought of. Two only were in favor of the movement, and not fearful of the consequences of advancing in an open prairie, and charging a disciplined army with a raw soldiery and two hundred bayonets.

Having learned the opinions of his officers, the general's next step was to ascertain the feelings of his men. They were found ready and willing to fight the enemy on his own

ground, since they evinced no disposition to leave it.

Considerable time had elapsed in these deliberations, and it was three o'clock in the afternoon before the Texan troops were ready to move forward upon the enemy. Once more they wheeled into line, the first regiment under command of General Burleson, forming the centre; the second under Colonel Sherman, the left wing; while the artillery under Colonel Hockley, and four companies of infantry under Lieutenant-Colonel Millard, took the right. The whole of the Texan cavalry numbered but sixty-one, and these, commanded by Colonel Lamar, occupied the extreme right.

When all was in readiness for the attack, the general gave an order to Deaf Smith in a low voice. Immediately he leaped upon a horse which stood near him, and with his axes galloped furiously away towards Vince's Bridge, followed by Felix.

The shrill tones of the fife, the clear, ringing notes of the bugle, and the din of the drum were now heard along the Texan lines, which were soon in motion, and moved steadily until within two hundred yards of the enemy's breastworks.

Captain Wilson with the Rangers had taken his position on the right of the Texan infantry, and advanced on foot. Ethington shouldered his rifle and joined them, resolved to "do his devoir" like a brave man, strike another blow for liberty, and avenge his fallen comrades who slept in the smouldering ruins of the Alamo, and at Goliad.

"Texans, hosses and alligators from Old Kentucky!" said Captain Wilson. "Yonder are our enemies. You have got good rifles in your hands, and know how to use them. Don't fire until you are sure of your man; for we meet the foe one to three, and that's considerable odds. But do your duty, and we will whip them so they won't forget the Rangers while they remember anything of an airthly nature."

This eloquent and highly patriotic speech was received with shouts of applause by the Rangers.

"Here comes the general, my lads," added the captain. "Listen, and let us hear what he is going to say."

In a moment all eyes were directed to the towering figure of Houston, who appeared in front of the Texan lines, mounted upon a powerful horse.

"Fellow-soldiers, countrymen, and friends of liberty, upon you rests the last hope of the 'Lone Star.' If you conquer the enemy, the rights of Texas will be secured, and you will return in peace and covered with glory to your wives and sweethearts; but if you fail, you will never leave this field alive. You will share the fate of Travis and his men."

At this juncture, Deaf Smith was seen spurring his horse madly towards the general, swinging an axe triumphantly over his head. Pulling up his panting steed with a force that brought him upon his haunches, he addressed a few words to the commander-in-chief.

The latter drew forth his sword, and while its polished steel gleamed in the sun, added in a voice which rang out along the lines like the tones of a deep-toned trumpet:—

"Fellow-soldiers, you have thirsted to meet the dictator and his minions face to face, and behold the hour has come. The tyrant is before you, there is no retreat, you must fight! Vince's Bridge is cut away, and victory or death is ours. I ask no man to do more, or exert himself more, than I do. He who would fight, let him follow me, and remember the Alamo!"

As the general ceased speaking, he turned his horse's head, and shouting to his men, bore down into the teeth of the foe, while a loud and angry murmur, like the voice of many waters, arose from the Texan lines, as they swayed to and fro an instant, and then followed their leaders, each arm inspired with the strength of three of his enemies. "Remember the Alamo! remember the Alamo!" and the heart of every Texan swelled with indignation, and their eyes flashed with fury, as the battle-cry passed from mouth to mouth, inciting all to deeds of prowess almost without a precedent in the annals of war.

The enemy received the last hope of the "Lone Star," drawn up in perfect order. At the distance of sixty yards they opened a fire upon the advancing Texans; but their aim was bad, and most of the leaden hail whistled harmlessly over their heads.

"Steady, men! reserve your fire until the word is given!" thundered Houston, and well each man obeyed. When within pistol-shot of the Mexican columns, the word "fire!" was shouted along the Texan lines, and a deadly volley was poured into the enemy's ranks, prostrating them as the winds shake off the leaves in autumn.

When they had discharged their pieces, they did not pause to reload them, but rushing forward upon the foe, broke them over their heads. This done, they drew their pistols from their belts, fired them with terrible effect, and then threw them at those nearest them. Then unsheathing their bowie-knives, they clambered over heaps of the slain, and plunged them to the hilt in the bodies of those in the rear. Thus the work of slaughter went on, and the red demon of carnage rode triumphant over that prairie, so peaceful and bloodless an hour ago.

The right and left wing of the Mexican army gave way before the irresistible charge of the Texans; but the centre remained firm, and strove with desperate energy to withstand the shock. At this critical period Santa Anna prepared to charge the Texan infantry at the head of five hundred of his best men. Houston instantly perceived the danger, and rallying his men, and putting himself at their head, stood his ground manfully, and shouting the battle-cry once more, ordered them to fire.

"Take good aim!" cried Wilson to his Rangers, and the command was well obeyed. When the Texans poured forth their leaden storm once more, but thirty-two out of the five hundred who had prepared to charge them remained among the living, and they were instantly made prisoners.

A terrible panic now seized the enemy. They saw their comrades falling on every hand, and felt that they had never encountered such determined foes before. Masses of the dead, presenting a horrible memento of war, lay piled up where their front ranks had received the charge of the Texans, and mounting over this ghastly breastwork, those who remembered the Alamo, plunged their reeking blades into the living men who fought behind them.

The prowess of hirelings was not proof against the valor of soldiers who contended for human rights; they broke and fled, and the slaughter became more fearful still. Towards Vince's Bridge the routed remnant of the dictator's army fled. When they reached the spot where they had crossed, by straining every nerve, urged on by the flashing steel of the Texans and their mad battle-cry, their consternation cannot be conceived when they saw the stream rolling darkly on, spanned by no bridge by which they could escape the fury of their conquerors.

Some with cries of mortal terror threw themselves into the water, which, before they had sunk for the last time, and while the pains of suffocation yet held them, was stained with the blood of their companions in arms; and when they went down to rise no more, the final bubbles that marked the spot where they disappeared were red as the currents which had warmed their own hearts. "Remember the Alamo!" were the last sounds that greeted the ears of the despairing wretches.

At the place where the bridge had been cut away many turned and fought, while some falling upon their knees cried out, in tones that long haunted the ears of Ethington, that they were not at the Alamo. But what did that avail with men who felt that they had been wronged past reparation, and by the treatment which they had received from their foes, no longer held to the usages of civilized warfare?

Excited by the scenes of the fight, and recalling what he had witnessed at Fort Alamo with a vividness but too real, Ethington cheered on his comrades, and was foremost in the melee. Side by side with Captain Wilson, and followed and imitated by the Rangers, he did his devoir nobly, and when he shouted the battle-cry, it thrilled like electricity through the heart of every man who heard it. Once, when the ensign who bore the banner—a star on a red ground—was wounded and fell, he rushed to the rescue, and with his own hand restored it, and struck down the daring fellow who had attempted to capture it.

After the flight to Vince's Bridge, an accident occurred which well nigh proved fatal to our hero. In his eagerness to follow up the advantage which they had gained, he became separated from the Rangers, and found himself contending singly with overwhelming numbers. Half a score of Mexican lances were instantly leveled at his person. Ethington saw the danger, but was not terrified. Death he had long held in contempt, and was quite willing to yield up his life upon a well-fought field.

He smiled grimly upon his foes, and resolved in his fall to give them good cause to remember him. With his rifle, which he had managed to retain during the conflict, he dashed aside many a thrust from sharp lance and bristling bayonet. At the critical

moment, when the exertions of one could not hope longer to be successful, the voice which Ethington had heard once before in the hour of battle, reached his ears amidst all the din of conflict; and immediately the tall form of Ridgley was seen scattering the foe to the right and to the left by the force of his unaided arm, followed by Felix and the captain of the Rangers. Ridgley gained the side of Ethington, and his assailants soon gave ground.

"Go yer de'th, massa debbil!" cried Felix. "Hurra for Mexicus and Texico!"

"Indebted to you for a second favor," said Ethington, as Ridgley pressed to his side, and the Mexicans fell back.

"Don't speak of it," replied Ridgley, coldly, wiping the moisture from his brow, and turning his attention to another part of the field.

"I am not so churlish as not to thank you for your bravery," added Walter.

"I want no thanks, young man. I came here to fight," answered the stranger, gruffly.

"The day is ours!" shouted Houston. "Three times three cheers for the Lone Star!" As the general spoke, the faithful horse which had borne him through the fight so bravely, reeled and fell to the earth. It had been struck by seven musket-balls, but had nobly borne his master until his last drop of blood was spent, and sank down at the moment victory was completely won.

The hero of San Jacinto had been severely wounded at the commencement of the battle, but had scorned to heed his hurts when there was so much at stake. He was quickly assisted upon another steed, and the "three times three" were given with right good will; and the frightened wretches who had survived the conflict heard it with awe and wonder, for they knew but little of the enthusiasm of men who had devoted their lives to the cause of freedom.

Ethington paused and looked over the prairie; it was covered with the bodies of the slain. Horses and men lay in heaps in every direction; the dead and the dying were mingled confusedly together. In the distance a few terrified fugitives were running hither and thither, endeavoring to conceal themselves in the prairie grass, or gain the covert of the wood. As the excitement of the battle passed away, a feeling of compassion took possession of Ethington, and he exerted himself manfully to stay the slaughter.

"Look there," said Captain Wilson, pointing upward with his bloody sword. Walter raised his eyes, and beheld two enormous ravens hovering over the scene of conflict, with their beaks turned to the west. Wilson and several of the Rangers raised their guns to fire at the birds poising above them.

"Hold!" exclaimed the general, prophetically; "the omen is a good one, it denotes the march of the empire westward!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUEL.—AUGUSTUS HENRIE.

ETHINGTON walked slowly towards the bivouac of the previous night, to which the soldiers, wearied of the slaughter, were returning in squads, without much regard to order. It was now night, and our hero thought of his appointment with Wikoff. Stretching himself by a fire which the Rangers had kindled, and ordering Felix to awaken him when the moon had arisen, he was soon lost in sleep, dreaming of the horrors of the day, and very possibly of Andrea St. Aubert.

Faithful to his charge, the African awakened his master at the time designated. Captain Wilson was seated near him, repairing his rifle which had been somewhat injured in the fight. Ethington had already made him acquainted with the strange appointment, and asked his services, which were offered with that genuine, though rough cordiality, which characterized the honest Kentuckian.

Provided with proper arms, they now repaired to the spot indicated by Wikoff. They stood by the waters of the San Jacinto—waters which had quenched more than one life that day. Occasionally there floated past them some mournful remnants of the fight—a hat, a cap, some fragment of a garment, and anon a lifeless body. While Ethington gazed upon the inanimate clay, as it was being born onward by the current, he asked himself if it had ever enshrined an immortal soul, and if so, what was the fate of that soul? He turned from it with a sigh, remarking:—

"How many that feared death as the greatest evil, have found it since the sun crossed the meridian! while I, who have regarded it as a friend that comes to hush up sorrows of the feverish heart, have been spared! Strange that the bolts of death should pass me by, and spend their force up-

on others! Inscrutable are the ways of Providence."

The moon was looking down upon the river with a tranquil light. The hour seemed too quiet for bloodshed, and was better suited to meditation and serious thought, than to the business which had called our hero and his friend to the spot.

Wikoff did not make his appearance, and Ethington paced up and down awaiting him, while Wilson seated himself beneath an oak, thinking, doubtless, of Marianna Lee. At the expiration of half an hour, the figure of a man emerged cautiously from the copse of trees. It was Wikoff. He appeared disappointed when he saw Ethington, and stood irresolute; but the keen eye of the ranger was fixed upon him, and he instantly signified that they were awaiting him.

"So you have survived the conflict?" said Wikoff, approaching Ethington.

"My presence seems to justify that conclusion," replied the latter, coldly.

"It strikes me that you didn't expect to see him," observed the captain.

"No matter what I expected," returned Wikoff. "I am here, and ready to proceed. Have you brought weapons?"

"I have," answered Wilson. "What distance do you propose?"

"Twelve paces," said Wikoff.

"Arrange it as you will," added Ethington. "It makes no difference to me."

The Kentuckian now paced of the ground.

"On which side do you intend to place me?" asked Wikoff.

"Upon that nearest the river," replied the ranger.

"And is that a specimen of your fairness? I protest against it, for my adversary will have all the advantage of the light. No, sir, I will not stand up and be shot at in that way. Measure the ground in another direction, or let me have the other side," exclaimed Wikoff, with a scowl of disapprobation.

"Don't show too much of the snappin' turtle," said Wilson, briefly.

"You had better comply with his wishes," suggested Walter.

The ground was now measured off according to the directions of Wikoff, and the parties now took their places. Wikoff found fault with the weapons which the ranger had brought, and concluded to use his own; and this was also agreed to by Ethington. Wilson was to count three, and the word three was to be the signal to fire.

Ethington appeared as calm as usual, and betrayed no anxiety for the results. He had beheld all the preparations unmoved, and in fact with total indifference. Not so with Wikoff; his cheeks were flushed when he first appeared, but now pale to ghastliness, while a sickly and sinister smile rested upon his lips. Deadly hatred and hostility were vividly traced in the expression of his whole visage. Though his arm did not shake when he took his stand, and the weapons were placed in his hands, he was evidently suffering from some emotion, anxiety or fear.

"Now, gentlemen, do not fire until I have pronounced the word three," said Wilson, taking a position equi-distant from the parties.

"Have you any word to leave for Andrea St. Aubert?" asked Wikoff, in a sneering tone to Ethington.

"Captain Wilson, I am ready," said Walter, calmly.

"Are you ready, sir?" asked Wilson, turning to Wikoff.

"All ready," replied the latter, with the most sinister smile.

"Then, gentlemen, remember the directions, and fire after the word three; for I want this thing to be done fair, and in a way that wouldn't disgrace old Kentuck itself."

Wilson paused a moment, looked steadily at the parties to see how they bore themselves, and then proceeded apparently well satisfied with the deportment of Ethington.

"Gentlemen, I shall now give you the word. *One.*"

There was no change perceptible in the features or attitude of Walter; but his antagonist grew paler, if possible, and smiled more frightfully.

"*Two.*"

Instantly Wikoff fired, in defiance of all the rules of honor, before the word three had been spoken. Ethington's arm fell to his side, the pistol dropped from his grasp, he tottered a step and sunk to the ground.

With a hasty imprecation upon Wikoff, who turned and fled, the ranger ran to his friend and raised him from the earth. Walter looked up in the face of the Kentuckian and smiled, and immediately became unconscious. Wilson took him in his arms and bore him swiftly towards the Texan encampment, where a surgeon was hastily summoned.

When Ethington's mind gained something of its former lucidity, he found him-

self in a darkened room, lying upon a comfortable bed. He heard soft footsteps and whispered words, like those breathed in the chamber of the sick. A young lady was seated near his bedside, whom, upon closer scrutiny, he discovered to be Marianna Lee. Our hero was conscious of being very weak, and was sensible that he must have been very ill. He glanced silently about the apartment once more, but saw no familiar object, with the exception of the maiden.

"Marianna," he said, in a feeble voice.

Instantly a gleam of satisfaction passed over the face of the young lady.

THE DUEL—THE TREACHERY OF WIKOFF.

"Then you remember me at last?" she exclaimed. "I am glad you are returning to consciousness. You have been very ill, and we have sometimes despaired of your life."

"And I am indebted to you for much good nursing, and probably my life," he added.

Marianna was about to make a reply, when the door opened, and a youth entered with light and noiseless footsteps. It needed no second look to assure him that it was the same that he had seen with Ridgley, though dressed in a different style. He now wore a black frock and pants, of fine fabric, and which fitted very neatly to his person, and became him well; and together with a light buff vest, silk neck-tie, and Byron collar, all adjusted with graceful negligence, gave him rather a dandyish appearance. Walter was prejudiced against the lad at first glance, and though he could but acknowledge that he was very good looking, he turned his eyes from him, mentally resolving to notice him as little as common courtesy would possibly allow.

"To this kind youth you are indebted for your recovery," said Marianna. "It is Augustus Henrie, a cousin of mine, who, though he has his eccentricities, is a very excellent lad at heart. I assure you, Mr. Ethington, his attentions have been unremitting."

Ethington reluctantly turned his eyes towards the youth again.

"I am very much obliged to you, my young friend, I am sure, and hope I may be permitted to acknowledge the kindness in a more substantial way," he said.

Augustus Henrie averted his eyes modestly, and appeared confused; but he rallied immediately, and replied, with tolerable grace and assurance:—

"To tell the truth, sir, which they say must not be spoken at all times, I have done but a very little to contribute towards your recovery, or happiness; and to my fair cousin, Marianna, you owe all your thanks."

Walter fixed his gaze once more upon the large, dreamy eyes of Augustus, and determined yet again not to like him.

"I evidently owe a debt of gratitude to some person or persons, and I am content to pay the larger share to Marianna. Will that do, my lad?"

"I am content," replied Augustus. But how is this? I did not expect to find you rational. It gives me great pleasure to see you thus."

"How long have I been ill?" asked Ethington, turning to Marianna.

"The battle of San Jacinto was fought three days ago," she replied.

"It has not seemed so many hours."

"Probably not, which is a very good thing, as you were not sensible of your sufferings and danger."

"Have I talked very wildly?" he asked, anxiously.

"You have talked considerably, and that question reminds me of what the physician told me—that I must not permit you to talk much if you should recover your consciousness. I must now enforce obedience."

"I shall endeavor to submit gracefully," he replied, with a faint smile; "for to tell the truth, I do not feel very strong."

Augustus now withdrew, and Walter was glad to be alone again with his fair nurse. He remarked, still smiling:—

"I should like that boy better, if he were not so foppish."

"He is a good-hearted creature," replied Marianna, "and I hope you will become very good friends."

Ethington now inquired about Captain Wilson, and learned that he had been wounded by a shot from an unknown marksman; and that the faithful Felix was unremitting in his attentions.

Marianna would allow him to ask no more questions, and he was forced to content himself with what information he had gained. Wearied with the exertion of talking, he sank into a refreshing sleep—the first he had experienced for several days. He awoke in the course of the ensuing night, and saw Augustus watching beside him. He took some medicine from his youthful attendant, and did not awake again until near morning, when the youth was still sitting by the bed very patiently.

Ethington observed him for a moment through his half-shut lids. He was sitting by a small table with his elbow upon it, and his forehead reposing in the palm of his hand. His features were regular, quite pale, though very comely to look upon, and some stray ringlets of his long, black, curling hair rested upon his cheek.

Despite the antipathy which Ethington had taken to Augustus, he was candid enough to admit there was something interesting and attractive about him, which under other circumstances might have won his friendship; but he could not forget that he had twice seen him with Ridgley. Walter's heart accused him of ingratitude. Had not this youth befriended him, and passed many sleepless hours by his couch of suffering? He resolved to conquer his prejudice.

In a kindly voice he urged the boy to retire, or allow Felix to take his place. Augustus assured him that he felt no weariness, but if he preferred the society of his colored servant, he would leave him. Ethington answered that he must be sadly in want of sleep, and under the circumstances he should prefer Felix. The youth withdrew, and as his light and symmetrical figure disappeared, Walter sighed and felt that he was ungrateful to the kind and unpresuming lad.

Felix manifested unfeigned joy at the prospect of his master's recovery, which he had hitherto despaired of, and declaring his fixed intention of punishing Captain Wilson for leading him into danger. He said he should "'spress himself freely on dat subjuck, and teach Massa Kentuck to promulgate," in a different direction.

Ethington now learned, with much satisfaction, of the capture of Santa Anna. Felix described very minutely his appearance, and his interview with General Houston, in which he styled himself, in the true spirit of arrogance, the "Napoleon of the West."

CHAPTER VII.

WIKOFF AND COGSWELL.

TIME passed on. April came, with its showers and sunshine. It was a warm, clear day; the sun had passed the meridian. A man was standing upon the east bank of the Neuces River, looking thoughtfully into the water. Just above him, on the right, was a thick chapparel, and below was a broad strip of bottom land or interval.

He turned slowly and walked towards the latter, and approaching the water, commenced washing out his rifle. While he was thus employed, another person appeared at the extremity of the bottom-land, and after scrutinizing him for a few seconds, ad-

vanced, though not without some hesitation.

"Washing out your shootin' iron?" he observed, when within a few yards of the individual first mentioned.

"Yes," replied the party addressed, gruffly. "It don't require much penetration to see that."

"I think I shall follow your example," added the other, nothing daunted by the very uncourteous reply.

"So it would seem," replied the newcomer, somewhat testily.

The other party completed his task, and sitting down upon the grass, observed the stranger with considerable interest.

"Perhaps you belong to the Rangers?" he remarked, at length.

"Perhaps I don't," was the brief rejoinder.

"Did you fight at San Jacinto?"

"I can't say that I did, particularly. I look out for number one, principally."

"That's the rule I go upon, and I find it works very well. I hope you won't be offended if I ask your name?"

"You seemed to be rather short with me just now, but I don't mind telling you my name. I am called Cogswell."

"A very good name, I am sure. In return for your politeness, I would say that my name is Wikoff."

"Rather interesting news," said Cogswell, squinting rather comically.

Wikoff smiled, and asked if he had long been in this part of the country. Cogswell replied that he had not.

"It appears somewhat singular," added Wikoff, "that you do not take part in the struggle now going on between the Texans and the Mexicans?"

"I have business enough of my own to attend to," answered Cogswell, with a scowl.

"Some enemy to punish, or possibly some fair girl to woo," replied Wikoff, lightly, at the same time watching the countenance of Cogswell with the greatest interest.

"With a quiet smile of satisfaction, he saw the blood rush tumultuously to his face, and he knew that he had touched the right chord at last.

"Stranger, you seem to be rather inquisitive, but in your last remark you was not far from the truth. I have an enemy to punish, and there is a fair maiden I would win."

"Spoken like a brave fellow and a true man!" exclaimed Wikoff, with warmth. I perceive that you are made of the right kind of material. I see plainly that we are destined to become good friends, and who knows but we may be of mutual service to each other, for I also have an enemy to punish?"

"Give us your bread-hook!" said Cogswell, with some enthusiasm. "You are a smart chap, and we shall get on well together."

"Very happy to make your acquaintance. Our meeting appears to be quite providential. I am glad you do not belong to the Rangers."

"I hate the Rangers and the captain more than all."

"I guess your secret; he's your rival, doubtless."

"I own up to the charge," responded Cogswell.

"Now this is a very singular coincidence, sir, for the man whom I can endure least of all men living, also belongs to the Rangers, or at least he is with them. The captain's name is Wilson, I believe."

"It is."

"I have met him," continued Wikoff.

"He is much attached to a harum scarum fellow sometimes called the 'Texan Bravo,' but whose name I think is Ethington."

"That's my man!" said Wikoff, contracting his brows fiercely.

"He was wounded in a duel, I heard, and came near dying. Perhaps you're the chap that drew trigger upon him."

I have no wish to deny it. I only regret that my aim was not better. Sit down here, and I will speak plainly. I once loved a maiden; her name was Andrea St. Aubert. A favorable opportunity offered, and I declared my passion. The result you have doubtless anticipated. I was rejected. A short time after, I saw her with a young gentleman. I inquired his name and was told that it was Walter Ethington, a favored lover. This information filled me with indignation, and I resolved to break up the engagement in a way that would be deeply humiliating to both—more especially to Ethington. I accordingly set my wits at work, and succeeded as well as I could have wished. The particulars of the plot by which I accomplished my purpose I will not at this time divulge. Grieved and mortified at the supposed perfidy of Andrea, Ethington came to Texas and joined in the struggle against the dictator of Mexico.

"When the surprise of Miss St. Aubert

had in some measure subsided, I again ventured to renew the old subject, and was more decidedly rejected than before. Soon after this event she suddenly disappeared, and it was rumored that she had gone to visit an uncle residing in Texas. Determined to carry my point, I immediately came hither, resolved that if I could not succeed in winning her affections, to be near to prevent any explanation between her and her lover."

"And perhaps do more than that?" added Cogswell.

"That is true; I would," replied Wikoff. "I cannot tolerate him; he is a serpent in my path. I would place my heel upon him and destroy him."

"There is every chance for you to do so," answered Cogswell. "The Rangers are encamped only a couple of miles below here, and he is with them. It would be easy to surprise him in his walks, and"——

"I understand; but there is a colored fellow with him, who scarcely ever leaves him, and it would be more difficult to deal with him than with his master."

"Serve him the same way," said Cogswell.

"And what will you do with Captain Wilson?" asked Wikoff.

"Just what you would do with Ethington, if you had him in your power. Have you found this Miss St. Aubert yet?"

Wikoff hesitated a moment, and then answered:—

"I have reason to suppose that I have; but I will not speak of the subject at this time, for reasons of my own. If I have found her, I will keep my own secret, for the present. And now let us devise some method of carrying out our mutual wishes in regard to these two men, whom we consider our enemies."

To this proposal, Cogswell readily assented; the two then proceeded to plan a nefarious scheme for the destruction of Ethington and Wilson. The conversation continued for a long time. The parties came to a very good understanding, and appeared mutually pleased with each other. But Wikoff was evidently the shrewder of the two; he had the deepest knowledge of human nature, and sufficient skill to make a mere tool of Cogswell.

When everything had been talked over and arranged in regard to their future proceedings, they walked towards the spot where the Texan Rangers were encamped. It will be well for us to remark, in this place, that after the capture of Santa Anna, most of the Mexican forces had withdrawn to the west side of the Rio Grande; but quietness and order was by no means restored to the frontiers of the Lone Star. Bexar was still harassed by marauding parties of the enemy, and by lawless banditti, who carried on a kind of guerrilla warfare, to the great annoyance of the inhabitants. The Rangers had accordingly been stationed there to punish offenders, and preserve peace and order. It will be seen by the foregoing that our hero had recovered from his wounds, and had accompanied the party to whom he had become attached, and whose dangers he had shared at San Jacinto.

As Wikoff and Cogswell neared the encampment, they advanced with more cautiousness, and when they came within sight of it, concealed themselves from observation in some musquite bushes. It happened to be the hour in which the Rangers were wont to parade; accordingly they were formed and went through various evolutions in fine style, after which they practiced target shooting.

Whether Wikoff and Cogswell did not experience sensations of shame at seeing those brave men disciplining themselves in warlike arts, in order to defend their country and repel tyranny, we do not know; but it is certain that they should have felt such emotions, if their souls yet retained a single spark of patriotism.

At a short distance from the company stood Ethington, observing their evolutions with interest; and near him was the faithful Felix.

"There," said Wikoff, pointing at the former, "you behold my enemy."

"And I must say that he is not a bad looking man," replied Cogswell. "Though I like him not, he has a fine figure, a pleasing countenance, and the reputation of being rashly brave—qualites which are very likely to make him a dangerous rival."

Wikoff muttered something indistinctly between his teeth, and glanced indignantly at his new friend.

"You do well to try to get him out of the way, if Andrea St. Aubert is inclined to love him," added Cogswell. Wikoff bit his lip, and remained moodily silent. The former resumed: "That straight, independent looking fellow, is the captain of the Rangers. He is as hateful to my sight as the 'Texan

Bravo' can be to yours. He bears upon his person a wound of my making; may the second one prove more deep and deadly. And then"——

"The most difficult part of the business remains to be done," interrupted Wikoff.

"What is that?" asked Cogswell.

"To win Marianna Lee."

Cogswell sighed heavily, and gave utterance to something that sounded like an oath; for he felt the justness of the remark.

At that moment Felix was observed to leave his master's side and walk up the river. He passed the spot where Wikoff and his ally were concealed, singing a favorite negro melody.

"Let us follow him," said Wikoff, and the worthy pair immediately left their hiding-place, and acted upon the suggestion. Felix sauntered on for the distance of half a mile, wholly unconscious that his movements were watched.

"Let us seize him," added Wikoff.

"Agreed," said the other; and both rushed upon Felix and caught him by the arms. He struggled violently and shook them off. Wikoff instantly leveled his rifle at the African's head and threatened to shoot him, if he did not submit peaceably to their wishes. Felix looked at the presented rifle with alarm, and asked what they wanted.

"Come with us, and do not resist," replied Wikoff. "Tie his hands, Cogswell, and if he resists, I will shoot him."

Cogswell took the belt which he wore about his waist, and approached Felix. The latter held out his hands, and when the former was sufficiently near, seized him with a powerful grasp and instantly thrust his body between Wikoff and himself.

"Fire, massa debbil; go yer de'th!" cried Felix, while he made a shield of Cogswell, who struggled in vain to free himself from the strong arms which held him. This demonstration on the part of the negro put Wikoff in a rage, and he would gladly have shot him, could he have done so without danger to Cogswell; but he could not, and it was in vain that he tried.

"Knock him over the head with the butt of your rifle; crack his skull!" exclaimed Cogswell.

"'Spress yerself; promulgate," said Felix, watching the movements of Wikoff attentively, who, resolved to follow Cogswell's advice, now cautiously approached the negro with his weapon raised.

The moment came for which Felix had waited; he raised his great fist, dashed Cogswell to the earth, and with a shout sprang upon Wikoff. With his left hand he arrested the descending weapon, and with the other struck a tremendous blow against Wikoff's forehead, who fell down like an ox stricken with a butcher's axe.

"Go it, white folks! Yah, yah! Heah, heah!"

The next moment a "cullud indervidooal," resembling Felix more than any other person, was seen running very rapidly towards the camp of the Rangers.

When Wikoff and Cogswell recovered somewhat from the shock which they had received, they raised themselves slowly upon their elbows and gazed lugubriously into the faces of each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANDREA ST. AUBERT.—THE RING.

If the reader will consent to accompany us to San Antonio de Bexar, we will make him more intimately acquainted with characters who have hitherto been kept in the back-ground, or only casually noticed.

We are informed upon credible authority that the only places occupied by a white population in 1821, were the Spanish posts of San Antonio, Nocadoches and Goliad, comprising in all about three thousand inhabitants. Not long after, in consequence of the inducements held out to settlers, there was an extraordinary influx of emigrants from the United States.

Many of those who sought homes in the new country carried with them slaves. Mr. Ridgley was among the early emigrants from the great republic. He had settled in San Antonio, and accumulated a handsome property by industry and attention to business.

It is known that in 1832 the people of Texas formed a State Constitution, and tried to obtain from the Mexican Congress an admission into the confederacy, as an independent State. The refusal resulted in an appeal to arms, and after that period, San Antonio de Bexar had but little rest and tranquility; it was subject to continual alarms and invasions from the enemy, and fell into their possession several times.

Mr. Ridgley, having taken an active part in the war policy, was obliged on several occasions to seek safety in flight, and bore

arms against the invaders more than once. When the enemy were driven out, he returned to look after his affairs and repair damages; for war always leaves an imprint of his destroying hand upon everything which falls in his way.

Mr. Ridgley owned an elegant mansion at San Antonio, which had miraculously escaped destruction during all the vicissitudes of the sanguinary struggle, and we now find him occupying it with his family.

It was evening of the day succeeding the events of the last chapter. A gentle moon and bright silvery stars illuminated the arch of the overhanging skies. Two young ladies were walking arm-in-arm in the garden attached to Mr. Ridgley's establishment. Both were a little above the medium height, well-formed and bore a striking resemblance to each other. One was Andrea St. Aubert —our heroine—and the other, her cousin Rosalia, Mr. Ridgley's only daughter.

"If I thought," said Andrea, looking timidly at her companion, "that I have overstepped the bounds of maidenly reserve and modesty, I should indeed be deeply mortified."

"My fair cousin," replied Rosalia, earnestly, "highly endowed as you are with good sense and noble sentiments, it is quite impossible that you should or could have done aught to cause you a single sigh of regret or blush of shame. It is said that each of us has an angel, and that he keeps a record of all our worthy actions, and I am sure there has been something good accredited to you by his pen long before this hour—those very deeds which you are now disposed to blush and cry about."

A tear of gratitude moistened the dark eyes of Andrea; she pressed her friend's hand in silence.

"Had I been placed in your circumstances, my cousin, I should have attempted to do just what you accomplished so nobly. You have a deep conviction that there has been a cruel misunderstanding on the part of—of"——

"Walter," added Andrea, softly.

"On the part of Walter," said Rosalia; "resulting from the jealousy or malice of some person unknown. As your conscience acquits you of giving any real cause of offense, you have felt it your duty to be friendly to him still, and learn, if possible, the reason of his strange desertion of one so dear as you must have been to him; for I believe that few young gentlemen could see you without"——

"Hush, Rosalia; don't flatter me," said Andrea, blushing.

"You have learned that he still loves you, though fully of the opinion that you were false to your professions of attachment. In the hour of your bitter disappointment, you came hither to find what consolation you might in my friendship; that was not wrong, certainly. Soon after you learned, by various ways and means, that your false lover was here, fighting in the Texan army with rash daring, seeking death in the thickest of the fight, doing prodigies of valor, and providentially escaping unharmed on most occasions. All that was done afterwards took place with my approval, and the consent of my father, your uncle; for he said, 'it was a pity that two young persons who loved each other, should be separated by a slight misunderstanding.' Believing as he does in your innocence, be assured that he is too proud and noble to compromise you, in any manner whatever; and if the truth were known, has been rather severe with Ethington than otherwise. I am certain that he required your lover to return and ask pardon upon his knees."

"I am sure he ought to," replied Andrea, with a smile.

"And I will predict that he will, when the truth is known," added Rosalia.

"Hark!" said Andrea. "I thought I heard some one climbing over the wall."

"Where?" asked Rosalia.

"There—in that direction," answered Andrea.

"Let us walk towards the spot," said the other.

"No; let us retire to the house," rejoined her cousin; but Rosalia drew her along with gentle force towards the spot indicated.

"Don't be alarmed, fair ladies," said a voice. "Pardon this intrusion." The figure of a tall man emerged from the shrubbery which grew by the wall, and stood before the two girls. He lifted his hat and bowed very low.

"Come away," whispered Andrea to her companion.

"What is your wish, sir?" asked Rosalia.

"To speak a few words with Miss St. Aubert," said the intruder. "Will you do me the favor to retire a moment, that I may address her alone?"

"No, sir, I will not; she has no secrets that she would keep from me. If you have aught to say, speak on, or leave us instantly."

"You are pleased to be severe with me," said the man.

"Do you know this rude person?" asked Rosalia, turning to Andrea.

"His voice sounds familiar. I should say that I had met him somewhere; but if so, I have no desire to renew the acquaintance," replied Andrea with a slight shudder.

"You hear what Miss St. Aubert says," added Rosalia, firmly.

"I do," returned Wikoff, with another bow. "I once presumed to speak to Miss St. Aubert on a certain subject. She was pleased to discourage my hopes, and I submitted to my fate as best I might. Since that time I have struggled on with my unhappy passion, and I trust I shall overcome it; at least I shall trouble her no more with the recital of my love; it were a useless task, and painful withal, and I came not hither to speak of it. I came here to bid her adieu forever."

"It is Wikoff!" exclaimed Andrea, trembling violently.

"Yes, it is that unhappy man," sighed Wikoff. "Suffer me to kneel but one moment at your feet, to press your hand one moment to my lips, and then you will be spared the pain of meeting me again in this world of vicissitude and suffering."

While Wikoff was speaking, he advanced quickly, caught the hand of Andrea and sank upon his knees, pressed it hastily to his lips, and seemed loth to relinquish it.

"Go, sir, go," cried Andrea, much disturbed at this unlooked-for demonstration. "Leave me, I entreat of you, and never let me behold you again; your presence makes me miserable; I cannot be happy near you."

Wikoff released her hand, and arose from his humble posture, while our heroine clung nervously to Rosalia for support.

"Duty to God and to you, Miss St. Aubert, prompts me to say a few words more before I tear myself from your presence forever. There is a certain person—I will not speak his name in your pure ears—once favored with some portion of your regard, who now vilifies your name, and speaks it and causes it to be spoken where it should not be heard. I have heard the name of Andrea St. Aubert coupled with the rude jest and ribald song of yonder camp, and my blood has boiled to punish the villain."

"You mean Walter Ethington!" cried Andrea, in tones of real anguish. "You speak falsely—it cannot be—it is not his nature."

"Alas!" said Wikoff, solemnly, "how prone is the trusting heart to deception. Far be it from me to disturb your tranquility of mind, or trample upon the hopes which you still fondly cherish. Time will test my friendship and truth, though it cannot heal the wounds of a broken heart. I could have wished, and have wished, and do wish that this man whom you have deigned to love, were more deserving of your affections. He deserted you basely—most basely—and seemed insensible of the happiness of being beloved by an angel."

Wikoff paused, passed his hands suddenly across his eyes, and then added still more impressively:—

"Had this young man been worthy of you, I could have resigned all hope of winning your affections with half the eternal strife it is costing me; but let that pass; the ways of Heaven are inscrutable. Peerless Andrea, idol of my soul, I bid you adieu."

Wikoff bowed once more, and turning quickly, disappeared from view.

"Courage," said Rosalia, supporting Andrea, who was nearly unconscious, so much had she been agitated by this strange scene. "He has gone—we are alone."

"Forgive this weakness," said Andrea. "The sight of that man makes me miserable. I instinctively shrink from him; he terrifies me; he is evil; I know it by intuition."

The young ladies now walked slowly towards the house, Rosalia striving to re-assure and comfort her friend with gentle and hopeful words. Soon after entering the parlor, Andrea discovered that the ring she had worn on the third finger of her left hand was no longer there. She communicated the fact to Rosalia, remarking that it was the only article in her possession which had belonged to Ethington.

"Wikoff took your left hand," said Rosalia.

"And he has taken the ring," replied Andrea; "for I surely had it upon my finger when I went into the garden."

In this opinion, Miss Ridgley fully concurred; she had observed that the ring was rather large, and could easily be slipped off. This circumstance caused our heroine much

pain, for she highly valued the ring, and knew not what use Wikoff might make of it; and indeed she was not a little vexed at his presumption in daring to possess himself of it in such a manner.

While she was reflecting upon this subject, Mr. Ridgley made his appearance, bringing news of considerable importance. He had heard that there were a large number of Mexicans flitting up and down the Neuces River, watching for an opportunity to plunder San Antonio de Bexar.

"But the Texan Rangers are encamped near us," said Rosalia. "Are they not sufficiently strong to defend the place?"

"They are but a handful of men, although their number has been doubled since the battle of San Jacinto, and the enemy is said to exceed them greatly numerically—two to one, at least," replied Ridgley. "They are stimulated by the hope of plunder, and will fight better, probably, than Mexicans are wont without this powerful incentive. I had hoped that since the decisive affair at San Jacinto, we should have peace; but it would seem that we are doomed to disappointment. We have now to deal with what appears a lawless banditti, having no other aim than bloodshed and indiscriminate plunder."

"We must trust in the Rangers, my dear uncle," said Andrea.

"And in God," added Ridgley, solemnly.

"Was it not stipulated by Santa Anna, that all his forces should withdraw to the west side of the Rio Grande?" asked Rosalia.

"It was; and the promise has been in a measure fulfilled; but those who are now hovering about Bexar, like hungry wolves, care little for stipulations and agreements; they know no law but their own wills. They respect no governments, either human or divine, and their masters are their own unrestrained desires. If they would come out and attack us boldly, we should fear them but little, and have no great difficulty in defending our own; but they will watch their time and fall upon us like thieves in the night."

"Is the danger then so great?" continued Rosalia.

"I would not alarm you unnecessarily, but leave you to draw your own inferences from what I have stated."

Soon after this conversation the family retired, each unusually thoughtful, and anxious for the future.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.—OUR HERO A PRISONER.

WALTER ETHINGTON was considerably surprised when Felix returned and related his adventure with Wikoff and Cogswell, whom he described as accurately as possible; and our hero was not much at a loss to determine who they were, and the object they had in view. Some portion of Walter's misanthropy had worn off, and he was heartily glad that his faithful friend had escaped so well. He strongly advised him to be careful in his future walks, always to go armed, and never venture out of sight of the camp. He requested Felix to relate the affair to Captain Wilson, and both agreed that Cogswell and Wikoff must have been the parties concerned, and that some mischief was evidently in progress, which it was their duty to guard against by every rational means.

"Both of them have sought to take our lives," said Wilson, "in an underhand and unmanly way. Cogswell was, no doubt, the unseen marksman who wounded me after the battle of San Jacinto, and Wikoff acted the coward and the assassin by firing before the word was given; a circumstance which came near proving fatal to you. I do not believe the story of his being a successful rival. If his suit had prospered with Andrea St. Aubert, why should he be here, and why wish to destroy you? Depend upon it, he is a disappointed man; for success does not produce revengeful feelings. Look at the case of Cogswell; Marianna did not favor him so much as she did me. He perceived that he was loosing ground, and that I was rising in the esteem of Marianna in proportion. You know the result; he has sought my life ever since with as much zeal as Saul sought the life of David. Now these two fellows—Cogswell and Wikoff—are equally mated; they are both consummate villains, and it is our duty to keep our eyes open and not let them have it all their own way."

"I coincide with you in much that you have said," replied Walter.

"It's my settled conviction," added Wilson, "that this person who calls himself Wikoff is the cause of all your misfortunes. If time proves me wrong, then I will give up all claims to being an alligator from Old Kentuck."

"You mean well, Captain Wilson," answered Ethington, but he added with a faint

smile, and extending his hand to the captain, "we will continue the subject at another time."

"Felix," said the latter, when Ethington had walked away.

"Here's dis nigger," said Felix.

"Do you know what caused this fatal misunderstanding between your master and Miss St. Aubert?"

"Yes, sare, I do'sen't know," replied Felix, gravely.

"I like your master, Felix, and wish to make him more happy, if possible. If you know anything about this affair, don't be afraid to tell me."

"'Twouldn't be safe, massa cap'en."

"Nonsense, speak out."

"He cotched her walking in de garden wid anudder feller, I b'lieve, and dey 'peared mighty fond ob each udder, cried and kissed when dey parted."

"Well, go on, Felix."

"Dat's all, Massa Kentuck; couldn't 'spress myself more 'tickerly on that subjeck."

"So that caused all the mischief."

"Ob course."

"Go to the d——ll!"

"I'se jest agwine. I'll take yer compliments along. Yah, yah! Heah, heah!"

"You're a great nigger, Felix," added the captain, good-naturedly. You're worth your weight in gold."

"Go it, Massa Kentuck, promulgate, 'spress your *phelinx*, heah, heah," and Felix left the captain, not a little flattered by his off-hand though rather dubious compliments.

The Texan Rangers were encamped but a short distance from San Antonio, and late on the evening of the following day Ethington walked into the town. As he passed from street to street, his thoughts recurred to the past, more especially to his recent adventures in the land of the "Lone Star," his various extraordinary escapes, and the kindness which he had received on several occasions from strangers. He recollected the features of the gentle Marianna, and of the strange lad Augustus Henrie, who, with the former, had watched over him in hours of pain and unconsciousness.

The antipathy which he had felt towards the youth, in a measure subsided before he had parted with him at Mr. Lee's; but he was still inclined to look upon him as a vain, effeminate lad, who would never attain to any great degree of manliness, and who was more fitted by nature to the employments of the other sex than those of his own.

The reason of this will be more apparent when it is announced that our hero had always entertained a supreme contempt for effeminate youngsters, and dandyism in general; but we will not do him the injustice to lose sight of the fact that Walter—despite all his previous prejudices—was really attracted towards Augustus, and if he did not absolutely like him, he at least pitied what he considered his want of manlier qualities, and now when separated from him, felt the loss of his society sensibly, much more than he could have anticipated.

While Ethington thus mused, time flew on unheeded. The night had been made pleasant by a bright moon, but of a sudden dark clouds rolled up into the skies and obscured its beauty.

But Walter was conscious of no change in the surrounding elements; looking intently within he had not observed the changes going on without. Having no desire for human companionship, he seated himself upon a bench in a sort of square or *plaza*, near the centre of the town. The place was quiet and the solitude pleased him. The stillness of the spot and the pensive character of his meditations soon had their effect, and in a little time Walter was in the misty land of dreams.

He was awakened at length by the discharge of fire-arms, and loud and continued shouting. He sprang to his feet, at loss, for a moment, to account for what he heard; then the sharp crack of the Texan rifles reached his ears, and he divined at once that the town had been attacked by Mexican banditti.

The confusion, and firing, and outcries, rapidly increased. Guided by the sounds, Ethington hurried towards the scene of tumult. In leaving the camp he had not neglected to take his pistols, and he now congratulated himself that he had done so.

While he was dashing up one of the principal streets to mingle with the combatants, he heard shrieks and cries for assistance, proceeding from a dwelling which he was passing. He paused, saw lights flashing from the windows, heard voices and the sound of rapid footsteps within.

To run through the open gate and enter the open door was the work of a moment. Without hesitation he mounted the stairs,

still directed by the outcries, and the noise of the struggle going on above. Passing through a dimly lighted chamber, he entered one perfectly dark. As he crossed the threshold, the light from the adjoining apartment fell upon the figure of a tall man bearing a female in his arms; and as the latter struggled to regain her liberty and cried for help, it furnished sufficient proof that all was not right. Ethington therefore coolly knocked the man down, with the butt of a pistol, and caught the female from his arms. The instant the aggressor fell to the floor, another party darted from the room, and ran hastily down-stairs.

Walter bore his now nearly unconscious burden to the light. He looked into her face; her eyes met his, she uttered a faint cry and became insensible; it was Andrea St. Aubert.

"Strange fatality!" exclaimed Walter, gazing fixedly at the fair object once so greatly beloved. "Unhappy chance that brings us again together."

Heavy, hurried steps were now heard upon the stairs, and Ridgley dashed into the chamber, considerably excited, and judging from his disordered dress, fresh from a scuffle of some kind. He paused suddenly when he beheld Ethington, and seemed confounded.

Our hero was the first to recover himself.

"I believe I was in time to be of some service to this young lady," he stammered. "What has happened?" he asked, still confused and embarrassed, and placing Miss St. Aubert, who now showed signs of returning animation, in an easy-chair.

"I thank you in the name of Andrea," replied Ridgley. "Where is Rosalia?"

"I have seen no other female," said Ethington. At that instant there was a great crash in the next room. Ridgley caught the lamp from the table and ran in. The cause of the noise was soon discovered; the man whom Walter had knocked down had recovered his senses and made his escape by leaping through the window. Rosalia had fainted at the moment of Walter's appearance, and was found in the apartment unharmed, though very much terrified. She regained her courage instantly upon seeing her father, and hastened to minister to Andrea.

"The danger has passed, I believe, of whatever nature it might have been," said the young man. "I hear the sound of conflict near us, and I will therefore hasten to join my brave companions."

"Our house has been assailed by ruffians," replied Ridgley. "You have rendered me an important service, which I shall be sure to remember. The object of this attack I scarcely know, for I have not yet had time to collect my thoughts."

Without trusting himself to look again at Andrea, Ethington descended the stairs. The door was still open as he found it, but upon the steps lay the body of a man, apparently dead. Walter bent over him, looked at the face, and felt quite sure that it was Wikoff; but wishing to be quite certain of his identity, he entered the parlor where a lamp was burning, and returning with it, examined the features.

He was correct in his first impressions; it was indeed Wikoff. One hand lay across his breast, and upon the fourth finger sparkled a ring of uncommon brilliancy, as the rays of the lamp fell upon it. Ethington could not repress an exclamation of surprise, as his eyes rested upon the ornament, for he recognized it; he had once given it to Miss St. Aubert. How came it upon the finger of this man? was the first question that crossed the track of his thoughts.

Wikoff's chest heaved convulsively, and he gave signs of returning life. Walter dashed the lamp upon the ground with a muttered imprecation, and with a frowning brow walked hastily from the spot.

"Perhaps," he said, "he received the wounds in defence of Andrea; perhaps she placed the ring upon his finger with her own hand." And the thought nearly maddened him.

It is a singular fact that lovers always look at the dark side of the picture, and that which is really the most unreasonable appears the most reasonable to their distorted fancies. There were other inferences which Ethington might have drawn upon finding Wikoff in that vicinity, badly and perhaps fatally wounded, but his mind, morbidly active in conjuring up images to make himself miserable, was satisfied with its first conclusions, and so made no effort to explain the matter in any other way.

Feeling more wretched and tired of the world than he had for a long time before, he hastened to the spot where the shouting and firing were still heard. He was soon among the combatants, fighting with all his accustomed daring and bravery.

Suddenly he was prostrated by a blow upon the head. He knew no more of the fight; he heard no longer the loud ringing voice of Wilson, or the crack of the Texan rifles. It was broad daylight before he was again conscious of existence. He found himself lying on the ground, bound hand and foot. Around him lay several Mexicans wrapped up in their blankets, sleeping. He attempted to rise to a sitting posture, but could not. The bands upon his wrists gave him intense pain, and he felt very faint and miserable. He reconnoitered the spot as well as he could in a horizontal position, and perceived that they were surrounded on all sides by a dense chapparel. At a short distance was a tent, and judging by the sounds that occasionally came from it, Ethington concluded that it contained wounded men.

Though suffering much pain, our hero was forced to lie unnoticed for two hours, when a man came from the tent and approached him. He was not a little astonished at seeing the individual who now stood before him, for in him he recognized Cogswell, the lover of Marianna Lee. He was industriously smoking a *cigarillo*, and contemplated the prostrated figure of our hero with the calmest satisfaction.

Ethington asked him to loosen the cords a little, as his limbs were now considerably swollen; but Cogswell declined to comply with this reasonable request, assuring him that if he were to do anything in the premises, he should make his bands tighter.

"Miserable renegade!" exclaimed Ethington, indignantly. "I should have known that a creature who will fight against his countrymen, will not show common humanity towards a fellow-being."

"Here comes a gentleman who will doubtless entertain you more agreeably than I can," replied Cogswell, with a sneer.

Ethington turned his eyes with difficulty towards the person indicated, and saw his antagonist in the late duel at San Jacinto. His head was bound up with a handkerchief, and he was deadly pale from loss of blood.

"Well, sir, you are not with the Rangers now," said Wikoff.

"It is quite unnecessary to inform me of that fact," replied Ethington. "It is very evident that I am not among men of honor."

"Did you ever see this ring before?" asked Wikoff, holding up his finger.

"I saw you lying senseless upon the ground last night," retorted Walter. "You were in my power, but I scorned to take advantage of your helpless condition."

"You were very humane," rejoined Wikoff, changing color. "But what do you say of this ring?"

"Perhaps you purloined it; I don't know; a man without honor is capable of any meanness. If Miss St. Aubert bestowed it upon you, she was certainly very unfortunate in the choice of a friend. But you have yet to explain the cause of being found insensible upon the door-steps of the house where the lady resides."

"That has little to do with our present business. Suffice it that you have always been in my way, and were so last night; but it shall soon be beyond your power to mar my plans or baffle my purposes. Look up at the sun; it never shone more brilliantly; gaze your fill and say farewell, for you will never see it rise again."

"Dare you then lift your hand against my life?"

"The 'Texan Bravo' shrinks from the ordeal! I thought it was death that he was seeking?"

"I fear not death, when met honorably; but I never sought it at the hand of a villain who would make my demise the means of carrying out his nefarious schemes, and bringing down ruin upon others. I can die like a man; but remember that the Texan rifles will avenge my death. Perhaps you never saw one of the Rangers look through the double sights?"

Wikoff grew a shade paler, and Cogswell shrugged his shoulders significantly at the mention of the "double sights." Both knew the fatal significance of the words, for the sharpshooting of the Rangers was proverbial; and it is a well-known fact that great numbers of the enemy who were left on the field in various battles were shot through the head.

Wikoff and Cogswell now walked away together, while one of the Mexicans, more humane than they, loosened the cords about his limbs, which gave him great relief. Presently there was considerable bustle in the camp. The soldiers (if we may thus call them) were got under arms by their leader, the identical Captain Garcia, who had led an attack against Ethington and his two friends on the Colorado.

Our hero's feet were now set at liberty, and

he was marched out in front of the marshaled band by a file of men. Ethington understood these preparations well; it was evident that he was about to be shot, and he endeavored to compose his mind, and fix his last earthly thoughts on the only Being who could now assist and sustain him.

In the brief space that was allowed him for meditation, he reflected upon the stormy events that had been crowded into his life since he had left his native State, a reckless and hopeless man. As he could discern in the portents of the future no brightening of the sun of his destiny, he resigned himself to his fate without a murmur. Although existence had no charms for him, and he had often sought death, yet he could not but feel and confess to himself that he was not wholly prepared for the great change which awaited him.

The near prospect of dissolution brought with it clearer views of man and his duties. He began to doubt whether misanthropy was not a crime in the sight of God, and if the last few months of his life had not been sinful in the extreme. But there was now little opportunity to discuss such questions; he stood face to face with those selected to be his executioners—a band of lawless and savage-looking fellows, apparently dead to all the finer susceptibilities of human nature.

A man now came forward with a handkerchief to bandage his eyes, but Ethington shook his head, saying proudly:—

"I have often faced death, and I am not afraid to face it once more. It is the coward soul alone that shrinks from beholding the terrors of death."

"Proud to the last," murmured Wikoff, who had approached and stood contemplating our hero with a triumphant expression.

"And were you so presumptuous as to imagine for a moment that you would see my spirit unbend, and my manliness give way?" exclaimed Walter, who overheard the remark. "I know that such was your hope and expectation, but both were vain. I shall die as I have lived—a man. I am ready."

The file of men retreated a few paces, and left Ethington alone—a mark for the escopetas of a cowardly foe. He drew himself up and looked at them without flinching. Cogswell reappeared and spoke a few words to Wikoff, and the latter conversed with Garcia in a low voice.

The conversation, debate, or council, or whatever its nature might have been, lasted some time, and was carried on with much warmth.

The sun was high in the heavens, and shone down upon the parties with glorious brightness. The winds breathed gently among the flowers, and dallied with the undulating grass that grew upon the plateau. But in the air, and among the flowers, and the grass, and everything that whispered of life and beauty, there was a savor of death.

CHAPTER X.

COGSWELL AND MARIANNA.—A LOVE SCENE.

We will now return to Marianna, whom we shall find comfortably domiciled at San Antonio de Bexar, Mr. Lee having disposed of his property at San Jacinto, and removed to a small estate which he owned at the place we have mentioned. Marianna rejoiced at this change of residence for several reasons; and one of the most prominent was, that she hoped to escape the society of Cogswell, whom she disliked and feared.

It was the evening of the day upon which Wikoff and Cogswell met for the first time. Marianna Lee was the sole occupant of a small apartment fronting upon the street, while the other members of the household were either not within doors, or busy in another part of the house.

There was a heavy tread upon the steps, and soon a gentle knock upon the door. Marianna hastened to answer the summons, and met Cogswell upon the threshold. The blood forsook her cheeks, her heart beat faster, and it was with difficulty that she could restrain her emotions. Cogswell entered with the determined air of one who is resolved upon some important measure, and does not mean to falter in its execution.

His features never looked more repulsive and forbidding to Marianna, and she heartily wished the interview at an end. She was about to call her mother, when her quondam lover requested her to be seated and hear what he had to communicate. She reluctantly complied, and Cogswell mustered all his eloquence and ingenuity to make a final impression upon her heart. Vain attempt! Useless expenditure of words!

"You have long known, Miss Lee," he began, "that I have ventured to raise my

thoughts to you, and to come to the point at once, that I entertain a sincere affection for you. I have now called to hear, from your own lips, the decision of my fate. To be brief and plain—for I am a man of few words—will you become Mrs. Cogswell?"

"To be brief and plain, I decline," replied Marianna, firmly.

"May I ask your reasons?" continued Cogswell, with assumed calmness.

"There are many, Mr. Cogswell—I need not enumerate them—spare me that task, suffice it that there is a want of congeniality of disposition and temperament," said Marianna, in as gentle a manner as possible.

"Could not that objection be overcome—be melted away by time?"

"I think not; I can extend no such hope; it were wrong to do so."

"I can well guess the cause," said Cogswell, with much bitterness. "It is because I have a rival. Captain Wilson has stolen away the regard which you once entertained for me, and your blushes are my witnesses that I speak the truth."

"The person you have named never injured you in my estimation," returned Marianna, with some asperity of manner. "I regret to be forced to tell you that I never entertained any deeper sentiments of friendship than I now do."

"And that is saying but little, I suppose," he retorted, giving his fair auditor a searching glance.

"You are right, sir. There is no reciprocity between us. I should not make choice of one like you for a friend, much less for a lover. Do not be offended; you have wrung this confession from me. Learn wisdom; when a maiden says 'nay,' do not press her further, that you may enjoy some portion of her respect, if not her love. This subject, I now hope, is put to rest forever, and you will do me a kindness never to allude to it again, in any manner."

"You deceive yourself, Miss Lee; you have mistaken my character; your perversity does not discourage me. It is time that you should know me better; if you cannot love me, I will at least teach you to fear me. I have a power over you and your lover which you do not dream of."

"And do you threaten those who find it impossible to love you?" exclaimed Marianna, with dignity.

"I was saying that I had a power over your fortunes which you do not know of, or comprehend," he added, knitting his brows.

"And if you have this power you speak of, will you use it against a youthful maiden?"

"I will! I call Heaven and earth to witness that I will!" cried Cogswell, angrily. "You flatter yourself, like others, that you are safe here; that the Texan Rangers can defend the place against the attacks of the enemy."

"Banditti, you should have said," interrupted Marianna.

"Call them what you will; I care not; the fact stands the same. The destruction of San Antonio de Bexar is decided upon; before many days it will be heap of steaming ruins."

"If anything were wanting," retorted Marianna, with burning cheek and flashing eye, "to make me regard you with deeper loathing and contempt, it was what you have now uttered. Above all things I despise a traitor!"

"That is bitter language," said Cogswell, biting his lips.

"Let us part now; relieve me of your presence, I beg of you," responded the maiden, rising.

"Hear me out."

"No, I had rather see you out."

"You are witty at my expense; but my turn will come anon. Who will be your protector when Bexar is wrapped in flames, and its streets are full of bloodthirsty men to pillage and destroy?"

"I pray Heaven I may not be so much deserted by God as to accept protection from a traitor. I would sooner share the fate of the Alamo," said Marianna, with spirit.

"Listen. Just beyond the Rio Grande is a beautiful *rancho*, of which I am to be master. You have only to say a word to be its mistress, and San Antonio shall not be harmed. And more than this, Wilson's life shall be spared."

"Go, sir! I will make no terms. If all your allies are like yourself, San Antonio will never be conquered. As for Captain Wilson, if he cannot defend himself and maintain his position, it will be because he has forgotten San Jacinto."

"I perceive that you love to talk of San Jacinto; it gives you pleasure. But remember my words, the time draws near, San Antonio will burn—will become a heap of ashes, and the rangers shall be swept away with the besom destruction. Reflect one

instant; will you prevent this awful calamity?"

"Shall I light you out, or will you force me to speak to my father?"

Cogswell trembled with rage, and with a muttered curse and frowning brow, prepared to depart. He paused a moment on the steps, and darting a threatening look at Marianna, exclaimed:—

"You shall regret this insult; my words are prophetic. I will make them true. Bexar shall burn, and"——

"Marianna closed the door and did not hear the conclusion of the sentence, though she could well guess its import. She retired to her chamber, feeling truly wretched, and gave way to her emotions without restraint. That she feared Cogswell she could not deny; and his threats had terrified her greatly, in addition to the repugnance she had always felt towards him.

* * * * *

Soon after Walter Ethington's departure from camp, Captain Wilson gave orders to Lieutenant Cameron (a tried officer and soldier who had shared the dangers of various battles) to double the guard and take other precautions, as he had reason to believe that an attack upon the town was meditated by a band of the enemy that had been seen upon the west bank of the Neuces. Having given the lieutenant such instructions as he thought necessary, he called Felix, and proceeded towards San Antonio.

"Now, Felix," said Wilson. "Open your ears and hear what I am going to say," added the captain.

"Locomote yer sentiments—'luminate de natur ob de subjeck," responded Felix.

"You see I am going into town?"

"I know what for, massa?"

"Name it, you colored specimen."

"He, he! keep cool, massa Kentuck; don't go for to bein' hard on dis nigger feller; you're a-gwine up to see dat harnsum white gal; heah, heah!"

"Right, Felix, for once in your life."

"Don't blame ye, massa; I used to go to see a white gal once."

"*You?*"

"Ob course."

"Come, Felix, be careful."

"Yes, sare."

"Do you see this rifle?"

"Does I see dat rifle?"

"Yes."

"Ob course I does."

"Well, take it, and I will tell you what I want you to do with it."

"*Splanify* de natur ob de case, massa cap'en."

Wilson walked on a little while in silence, while Felix followed close at his heels.

"Now," he resumed, stopping just within the town, "I want you to stand here with the rifle, and if you hear any disturbance, or see anything that looks like an attack from the enemy, fire, and then run to the camp, as fast as you can, and turn out the Rangers."

"Yes, sare. I'll give ye a tall specimen ob runnin'; I'se good at dat."

"I've no doubt but you will do the running part well; but you must tell Lieutenant Cameron what you have seen as soon as you reach camp."

"Well, what'll dat be?"

"Why, you rascal! your skull wants rasping down. How should I know what you will see or hear? It may be one thing, or it may be another, and perhaps just nothing at all."

"Dat 'luminates de *cocoe* ob dis nigger; I magnifies de 'hole at a glance. But wouldn't it be safer not to fire till I get to de camp?"

"Snappin' turtles, and Kentucky alligators!" cried the captain; "your head is bullet proof. It might be safer for you, but not for me."

"You can't be safe wid dat Miss Marianna, no how; dem bright eyes ob hers will do de bisness in less dan no time, if not sooner. Dare's a great deal ob de magnificent fluid in dem top 'luminaries. Yah, yah!"

With a good-natured laugh the honest Kentuckian repeated his injunctions and walked on; in a few minutes he found himself blushing beneath the battery of Marianna's eyes. Before leaving camp he had deliberately resolved to speak to her in relation to the subject nearest his heart, but now that he was face to face with her, he was unable to say a word regarding the matter uppermost in his mind.

Marianna received him with uncommon kindness, and after some preliminary remarks and many blushes, she proceeded to relate what had passed between Cogswell and herself; repeating in detail, so far as she could recollect, all he had threatened concerning the destruction of Bexar.

Captain Wilson listened with breathless attention and rising indignation.

"It appears, then," said the latter, "that he has joined the band of Mexican outlaws

that is hovering about the Neuces river. His threats are by no means idle, and no doubt he intends to do all he has spoken of. I thank you sincerely for the confidence you have reposed in me, and it affords me inexpressible pleasure to have the means of protecting you in my power; also to feel assured that you have no—no"——

"No what?" asked Marianna, innocently.

"No friendship for a man capable of such baseness," he added, greatly embarrassed.

"I always feared him, and instinctively shrank from him. But tell me if you really think Bexar in danger?"

"Bexar can never be taken," said the captain, earnestly, "while half a dozen Texan Rangers live to 'look through the double sights.' Rest assured that when Cogswell marshals his forces about the dwelling whose roof covers Marianna Lee, that we shall be near."

The captain spoke enthusiastically, and was repaid by a timid yet grateful look from the maiden.

"Our foes are cowards," he resumed. "They turn pale when they hear the report of a Texan rifle. They know that we are devoid of fear, and can fight better than any other foe they ever faced. Let Cogswell presume to cross this threshold, no matter if he be followed by an hundred of his Mexican allies, he shall perish ignobly, or retire baffled, and burning with mortification."

"Your bold words re-assure me," said Marianna.

"If I dared," added Wilson, desperately, "to say what—what"——

"You have said 'what' twice, captain," remarked Marianna, demurely. "Shall I call brother James?"

"No—yes—by all means—certainly not," stammered the captain, dreadfully embarrassed, and an awkward silence ensued.

"I had thought," resumed Wilson at length, and then quite broke down; and Marianna was so much confused herself, that she lost her presence of mind and couldn't say a word.

The captain choked and went on again.

"I can face an enemy," he said, and stuck again.

"Certainly," murmured Marianna, who now really felt called upon to say something.

"I can face an enemy, but find it impossible to say—that is, to express, what I would like to on all occasions," added Wilson, with an effort such as a drowning man makes to catch at a straw.

Marianna was now trembling and blushing very much, and still trying to look perfectly unmoved and composed.

"I thought James would return before this time," she managed to articulate.

"Marianna," continued the captain.

"Yes," said the maiden.

"Did you say yes?" he added, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead.

"Yes," said Marianna.

"Is it possible that I am so happy as to be"——

"What?" asked the maiden, dropping her embroidery and scarcely knowing where, or who she was.

"Alligators and Kentucky hosses!" exclaimed Wilson, frantically. "I'm a blundering school-boy. The fact is, I love you."

"Dear me!" said Marianna, striving to hide her confusion.

"Yes, dear you," answered the captain, turning from red to pale, and from pale to red in an incredible short space of time, and taking her hand very cautiously and respectfully.

Marianna burst into tears, and felt that her heart was beating very fast, and that her cheeks must be dreadfully crimsoned, especially after the captain was so bold as to draw her towards him, and——, but for her sake we will not finish the sentence.

The "ice," as the saying is, was now "broken," and a mutual understanding seemed to be speedily brought about. If Marianna trembled and wept, it was not because she was unhappy; while the captain was filled with wonder at the progress he had made, and was ready to believe that he was at camp asleep and dreaming profoundly. He had just begun to think there was some foundation in his dreams, when Mr. Lee and James appeared; a circumstance, which, however agreeable it might have been at any other time, certainly did not wholly harmonize with his feelings now.

Beside, his extreme modesty and bashfulness left him still in doubt as to the state of Marianna's affections. What would have seemed amply sufficient to a more experienced man in love matters, appeared enigmatical and of dubious meaning to him; though on the whole he felt very well satisfied that he was getting along so finely; and we presume the discerning reader is pretty much of the same opinion.

Other subjects were now discussed by the new-comers, and the threats which Cogs-

well had made against the peace and safety of San Antonio de Bexar was fully talked over. By this time the captain had forgotten Felix, and the solitary vigil he was keeping. The moments winged themselves rapidly away, and the small hours of the night approached.

Suddenly there was the crack of a rifle that reverberated sharply from street to street; and brought the captain to his feet, as though he had received a powerful shock from a galvanic battery.

"Bring out your weapons!" he exclaimed; "there is danger near; perhaps the town is attacked."

Marianna's cheek grew pale, and she thought of Cogswell's threats. The captain's trepidation vanished at once. The sound of a rifle and the prospect of a fight aroused all his warlike blood and quickened his energies. He could now speak firmly and calmly, and express his wishes without difficulty. The bright eye of the maiden might abash him, but from the eye of an enemy he never shrank.

"Hark!" he exclaimed. "I hear the tread of armed men; they approach the house. Hand me out one of those rifles. Miss Lee, do not fear, keep out of the range of the windows; extinguish the lights."

Wilson stepped to the window the moment the lights were extinguished, and looked out. The street in front was full of men.

The captain fell back and spoke to his two companions in whispers. "There are men in front of the house; they are preparing to enter; be ready to give them a volley. Marianna and her mother had better retire to a situation less exposed."

They now heard the gate, which gave access to the little yard in front, opened softly. They were obviously meditating a surprise.

Young Lee was no longer able to curb his curiosity, and followed Wilson's example of reconnoitering from the window. He laid his hand nervously upon the captain's arm, saying in a voice not above his breath:—

"I see a figure that resembles Cogswell. And look! those with him are Mexicans. I know them by their jaunty rig, and by high colors, if by no other means. Cogswell is disposed to keep rather in the background, and put his fellows forward."

"He's a coward," said Wilson.

"Do you know what I think he's here for, with those ugly chaps?"

"I don't," replied the captain.

"I will tell you; 'tis to carry off Marianna."

"Do you think he will do it?" asked the Ranger, significantly.

"If he does, he'll have to carry off several of us, or settle up our earthly accounts for us," answered young Lee, firmly.

"Can you see him now?" whispered the captain, looking anxiously forth in the dark.

"I can't; he has stepped back. What does this delay mean, I wonder?"

"Surrounding the house, most likely. Listen! they are trying the door."

The door was shaken gently at first, and more violently anon, by those without. The parties within waited long enough for these preparations to assume form sufficiently offensive to warrant them in acting on the defensive, when Wilson urged the propriety of firing upon them. His companions were not averse to this proposition, for James had been anxious to look through the sights for the last five minutes.

"You see a cluster of fellows there by the gate?" said the ranger.

"Yes," said Lee, "and we will thin it out."

"A fine chance for a shot," continued Wilson; "let us improve it."

The moon whose light had been hitherto deeply obscured by clouds, now shed a momentary gleam upon the swarthy faces of the group, revealing dimly their outlines. They stood, carelessly leaning upon their escopetas, as if awaiting some signal from their companions at the door, not dreaming that their presence was suspected by the inmates.

"Give them your lead," whispered the ranger.

The report of three rifles breaking suddenly upon the stillness of the night, and upon the unsuspecting ears of those without, gave a startling indication that they were discovered.

A sharp cry of pain was heard, a few half-uttered exclamations and curses, and when the smoke had cleared away, not a Mexican was to be seen; but very soon there was a shower of balls against the house, perforating the walls, and shivering the glass, doing no other injury.

It was in vain that Wilson strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the figure of Cogswell; he took good care not to expose his person.

There was an interval of silence, and a suspension of offensive operations on the part of the belligerents; they were doubtless holding a consultation. But the temporary calm was of short duration; a general attack upon the dwelling speedily followed, and it was very certain that those within could not long defend it when there was such a disparity of numbers.

Doors, windows, and every assailable part was assailed simultaneously. Lee and his companions fought with heroic courage; they passed from window to window, dashing back their enemies, and putting forth efforts that seemed well-nigh above human capacity.

Wilson thought of Marianna, and as he beheld the foe fast gaining ground, the thought was fraught with unspeakable agony. She would unquestionably be torn from him, and irrevocably be lost to him at the very crisis when he was sure that he had some share in her affections.

In every assailant he hoped to met Cogswell; and growing desperate at length, he loudly called on him and dared him to an encounter; but there was no response, and Wilson cursed his cowardice.

The enemy were pouring in at the window, and for the first time the bold ranger experienced a feeling of despair. He thought of Cameron, and would have given his right hand to have heard the steps of the Texan Rangers.

"Where are my brave fellows?" he exclaimed. "What can keep them away so long?" At that critical juncture, to render the scene more deplorable, Marianna and her mother rushed into the apartment closely pursued.

The ranger threw his arms about Marianna, and with his good sword defended her bravely, making his own fearless bosom a bulwark for her defenseless head. The hand that had felt weary but a moment before, was endowed with double energy; for the gentle being whom he now pressed to his heart had restored all his strength, and fired his soul with determination.

"We are lost!" cried Lee, "but we will perish doing our duty."

"Yes," we will all die together," said Mrs. Lee. "Our separation will be short, our reunion speedy."

"Yield!" cried a voice from the middle of the assailants; "yield, and we will spare your lives."

"'Tis Cogswell," exclaimed Mrs. Lee.

"No, villain! we will fight it out," replied Lee. "We will not yield our defenceless women to you; they prefer to die honorably with us."

"Desist!" shouted Cogswell once more; "every moment you endanger the lives of those you love."

"Meet me like a man," cried Wilson; "come forward, and let us decide this matter face to face."

"Never!" replied Cogswell. "The affair is already decided. You are surrounded, and cannot hold your ground three minutes longer. Relinquish your hold upon that girl, whose life you are recklessly exposing, and I will withdraw my men."

The ranger's blood boiled with indignation, and he made desperate efforts to cut his way through the leveled lances to reach Cogswell.

Suddenly there came sounds that made every heart leap and every ear tingle. The points of both lance and sword fell to the ground; for the trumpet tones of Cameron were ringing upon the air.

"Forward, my lads—forward—steady—now give it to the swarthy d——ls!"

The deadly crack of the Texan rifles fell like sharp thunder upon the senses of the assailants within the dwelling; they rushed simultaneously towards doors and windows, struck with a frightful panic; and many of them fell pierced with rifle balls while forcing themselves out.

"Was there ever sweeter music?" cried Wilson, as the rifles continued to utter their voices of death.

"Never, since the world was made," replied Lee. "Cameron and the Rangers forever! God bless them!"

"Those without are flying," said James.

Captain Wilson sprang to the window, still supporting Marianna, and shouting the name of Cameron. The well-known voice of the commander reached the ears of the Rangers, and they cheered him to the echo.

In an instant Cameron sprang in through a shattered window, and Wilson wrung his hand in expressive silence; the hearts of all were too full to speak. The dark face of Felix appeared in the window.

"Go yer de'th, Massa Kentuck!"

"All safe, Felix," said the ranger in a low voice.

"Where's Massa Ethington?"

The captain's countenance fell, and he

looked inquiringly at Cameron; the latter shook his head. The African glanced from one to the other, and his large eyes displayed a frightful quantity of white.

"Here's a scrape for dis nigger," he exclaimed. "You'd better all on ye be dead, and dis child better be dead, too. Why don't you 'luminate de subjeck, some on ye?"

"We can't," said the captain. "I would most gladly, if I could. I trust he is safe, however."

"I sha'n't express my ideas till I know suthin 'tickerlar in regard to de natur ob de pecooliar circumstances ob de case," replied Felix, ominously. "But if dis darkey," he added, "war to promulgate any 'pinion, it wouldn't be ambigerous to de happiness ob dis occasion."

Lights were speedily procured, the dead and wounded removed by the Rangers, and such precautions for the general safety taken as the case required. The enemy were completely routed, and the bold Texans had the pleasure of receiving the heartfelt thanks of the people of Bexar whose homes they had defended.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUTING PARTY.

UPON the following morning Felix was seen wandering about with a melancholy and dejected air. His master could not be found, and no one could give any information respecting his fate. Ridgley communicated to the captain what had transpired at his house the night previous, and how opportunely the young man had appeared to do him an important service; he had hastened away to join the Rangers, and that was all he knew of his movements on that occasion. All agreed that he was either captured or slain, and as he could not be found, they had good reason to suppose that he was a prisoner.

As Felix was walking up and down in the vicinity of the Texan camp, with a sad countenance, he beheld the lad he had seen at San Jacinto (and who always seemed to be near Ridgley) approaching.

"Well Massa 'Gustus," said Felix, "the Mexicums hab cotched Massa Ethington at last."

"So I have heard," replied Augustus. "What do you intend to do?"

"What am I gwine to do?"

"Yes, Felix."

"I know what I'd do, if I could."

"What?"

"I'd send dat white gal dat disappointed him to de plenopetentiary for life," said Felix.

"Oh, you wouldn't be so bad, I know," answered Augustus, promptly. "Perhaps she deserves it, though," he added, quickly.

"If she don't, nobody does."

"There's no knowing what girls will do," said Augustus.

"Dat's a fack; dey isn't to be trusted no how."

"I suppose you will try and find your master, Felix?" said Augustus, looking searchingly at the African.

"You may bet your life on dat, Massa 'Gustus. If dis child can't find him, dere's no live nigger dat can."

"I like your spirit," added the lad. "I have half a mind to go with you."

"You?" exclaimed Felix contemptuously.

"Yes, me," answered Henrie, striking himself lightly upon his chest with his gloved hand.

"Well, you look like it," added the negro. "Heah, heah!"

"Why do you laugh, Felix?"

"Why does I laugh?"

"Yes."

"To hear such a dainty little fellow talk ob gwine with me. Yah, yah!"

"It is not always the largest person that can do the most, Felix. You know where there is a will to do good there is always a way."

"So I've heered; and you showed a heap of kindness to massa when he was wounded. He speak ob you bery offen since he's been here. He said he couldn't keep you out ob his mind, on no 'count whatsomever."

"Did he really say that?" asked Augustus, earnestly. "I thought he didn't seem to like me very well for some reason."

"Well, he got ober dat, and felt bery lonesome and solemcholy 'kase you wasn't here. I've heered him call Massa 'Gustus many a time in his sleep."

Upon hearing these words the features of the youth were lighted up with a strange gleam of satisfaction.

"Ah, well, it is pleasant to be remembered by those whom we esteem," said Augustus, with a faint smile. "It makes the heart feel lighter."

"Do you tink cullud persons hab hearts, massa?"

"There can be no doubt of it," replied Augustus. "I have known some very respectable negroes whose sensibilities were as acute, apparently, as a white person's. In regard to your master, I hope you will leave no means untried to aid him. If you need any pecuniary assistance, I shall be most happy to assist you."

"Tank you, massa, but I don't need nothin' in dat line," answered Felix.

Wishing the latter success, Augustus turned and walked to the camp of the Texan Rangers, and was met on the way by Captain Wilson, who manifested much pleasure as well as surprise at the unexpected event.

"You are," said the ranger, "probably aware of the fact that Mr. Ethington, the brave gentleman, to whom you showed considerable kindness is missing, and was doubtless captured during the skirmish of last night."

"Yes, I know," replied the youth, "and have come to ask what you intend to do?"

"I will tell you, my lad, with pleasure. I shall take a few of my bravest and trustiest fellows, and follow the enemy as far as the Indian follows the trail of a marauding war-party. It never shall be said of an alligator from Old Kentuck, that he deserts a friend in the time of his extreme need. No, no; that won't do; I must shoulder my rifle, take their track, cross the Neuces, traverse prairies, forest and chapparels in search of my friend."

"It gives me pleasure to hear you say so!" exclaimed Augustus, warmly. "I knew you were of a bold and chivalrous nature."

"Whether that be the case or not, the man whom I am going to seek is the soul of soldiery, the heart of honor; and I will never forsake him, while there is a chance, however small it may be, of serving him, If I cannot avert his fate, I will incur the risk of sharing it, if I can do nothing more; friendship requires as much as this."

"Possibly it is too late to be of any essential service to him," added Augustus in a low voice.

"Very true. He has been an object of particular dislike to our enemies from first to last; and it is greatly to be feared that they will make short work with him; more especially if the man called Wikoff and the villain Cogswell have anything to do with the matter."

"You think this Wikoff whom you have mentioned is an enemy to him?" said Augustus.

"A most bitter and uncompromising one; for you see there is a woman in the scrape."

"I have heard that he loves my cousin Andrea," returned Augustus.

"Yes, and that makes all the trouble. It appears that Ethington was sure enough of the girl, and loved her tenderly, until some fatal misunderstanding, the nature of which I do not exactly know, and never could find out," observed Wilson.

"It is to be regretted that he never tried to have the difficulty explained," resumed Augustus, thoughtfully.

"He did not like to say much about the subject; and the fact was, he said it never could be explained; but it is my opinion that this same Wikoff had an agency in the affair," answered the captain.

"Have you seen Ridgley, this morning."

"I have, and he told me of the unwarrantable attack on his mansion, and of the service rendered by our mutual friend, Ethington. It appears that Mr. Ridgley is Miss St. Aubert's uncle?"

"Yes."

"You know her, then."

"Very well, but not quite so well as I wish I did," said the youth, with a sigh.

"Why, my lad, you are not in love with her, are you?"

"Oh, no; but I like her very well when she pleases me."

"Is she handsome?"

"Rosalia thinks she is."

"Well, what do you think?"

"My opinion isn't worth much on such matters; but I should say that she had a fair share of beauty, though not much more than usually falls to the lot of young ladies. She has regular features, and Rosalia says a very good figure, but I imagine I could find fault with both."

"Rosalia is Mr. Ridgley's daughter?"

"And consequently my cousin, also."

"Well, I hope all will come right ultimately."

"No one desires such an event more sincerely than the youth now before you," added Augustus, sighing.

With mutual good wishes the parties separated, the captain to make the necessary preparations for pursuing the enemy, and the other to follow the bent of his own fancies, whatever they might be.

Cameron and a half-dozen of the boldest and hardiest of the Rangers were selected to carry out the object in view, while the company was left in command of the second lieutenant until they should return. The captain did not consider it safe to take more men, as the town might be attacked, when all would be needed in its defence.

Well armed, and feeling fully prepared for any emergency, the little party set off on the expedition, followed by the good wishes of those who remained behind. They crossed the Rio San Miguel, and directed their course towards the Neuces. Felix had joined Wilson and his brave fellows, greatly elated with the prospect of being of any service to his master.

It was found a matter of some difficulty to trace the enemy. They were obliged to proceed slowly, and with the observance of much caution, to prevent a surprise by large parties of Mexicans who might be scouring the country in that vicinity. During the first half day's travel, numerous signs of the retreating enemy were seen; but after passing a small tributary of the Rio Frio, they discovered that they were no longer guided by the landmarks that had directed their footsteps previously.

The region which they were now entering differed materially from that behind them, being covered with dense chapparel and stunted trees, interspersed with ponds and small salt lakes. After spending considerable time to find traces of the enemy, and the night approaching, it was thought best to camp in the neighborhood, and prepare for a more thorough and earnest search upon the following day.

Wilson and Cameron stood apart from their companions. With folded arms and thoughtful faces, they watched the shadows of night stealing over lake and chapparel.

"An hour like this casts a spell upon my spirit," said Cameron. "I love to see the glare of day fade and give place to the dim, placid twilight."

"I have similar feelings," replied Wilson; "but I like night best when more advanced towards the small hours, and the moon and stars are mildly beaming."

Cameron made no reply, and the parties remained silent. Wilson was the first to speak.

"That's a heavy rifle of yours," he said, glancing at the weapon upon which Cameron was leaning. "I dare say it has been of service to you in its time?"

"No money could induce me to part with it, because I have proved its metal on many occasions. Did I ever tell you of an adventure that I had once near the Red River?"

"You never did; I should like to hear it," said Wilson.

"Several years ago," resumed Cameron, "I was hunting near 'Cross Timbers,'* not far from Red River. The Indians were then troublesome, and frequently committed their depredations upon the frontier settlements; but I was fond of hunting, and cared little for them, willing to trust to my own courage and ingenuity in any emergency that might occur. I carried this same rifle, and was called one of the best shots in the country.

"Many people said it was a piece too heavy for common use; but I was accustomed to it, and it didn't feel burdensome to me; and when I fired, it was sure to do the right thing, for what animal could carry off an ounce and a half of lead, skillfully sped on its errand?

"Having discovered Indian signs one day, I thought it best to change my hunting ground; and so put a considerable distance between myself and the spot, and encamped on the wide prairie, bounded on the east by the 'Cross Timbers.' Not long after this event, I was sitting on the bank of a small stream, resting my weary limbs after a long and fatiguing hunt, when I was fired upon and slightly wounded.

"I was fortunate enough to discover the marksman, who proved to be an Indian, of what tribe I do not now remember. I instantly shot him dead, and then perceived that he was not alone; for one of his brethren was with him, who made good his escape. Time passed on, and I was undisturbed in my amusements for a long time.

"One day not feeling well, I returned to my camp sooner than usual. I lay down and tried to sleep, but couldn't. I felt uneasy and nervous, and so arose and went out on to the prairie. The grass was now very

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* A continuous series of forest, varying in breadth from five to ten miles, and extending in a direct line from the source of the Trinity northward to the Arkansas River.

tall, and the hot suns of the season had dried it until it was crispy, and rattled as I walked through it. I ascended a gentle swell and looked around me. The scene was a grand one. On one hand was the 'Cross Timbers' dimly seen in the distance, resembling a dense wall of wood built by human hands; while in every other direction the prairie stretched away until lost in the distance. The sun was getting low, and looked like a sunset on the sea. As my eyes wandered from point to point, they were suddenly fixed upon a solitary figure several hundred yards distant, at the foot of the long swell or roll upon which I was standing. He stood in an open space, and at first I wondered how that could be, as the grass was so high in every other place; but the affair soon explained itself.

"More careful observation showed me that the solitary figure was an Indian, and his object in plucking up the dry grass was evident; he was going to fire the prairie! It was doubtless the same fellow that had escaped at the time when I had been fired at. He had discovered my retreat, and was about to revenge his comrade in a signal manner.

"The wind was blowing fresh towards me, and if the grass was once set on fire, no power on earth could save me, for the fleetest horse could not run fast enough to escape its devouring flames. A terrible dread of that kind of a death came over me. I stood like one fascinated, and gazed at the preparations of the savage. He stood in the middle of the open space that he had made, with a blazing torch in his hand. Innumerable thoughts rushed through my mind in an instant of time. I was never so completely paralyzed and stupefied before in my life. The power of thought seemed the only power left me, and that was stimulated to an unnatural degree. The past, present and future were reviewed and speculated upon in that brief and broken fragment of time in which the savage stood waiting for the brand to burn up more brightly before he thrust it into the grass.

"Yes; my destiny was to be burned! Some hunter or traveler would find my body charred and blackened; and others, after a time, would pass my bones bleaching in the sun. I shuddered; my eyes felt hot; my tongue was dry, and I imagined that I felt the flames creeping over me. If it had been a danger that I could have battled with, or if I could have seen any chance for escape depending on my own exertions, it would have been different; but now all I could do was to stand and stare the most dreadful of all fates in the face. You must remember that all these ideas and reflections rushed through my brain in the shortest appreciable time; for you must know that the sudden prospect of great danger from which there is no apparent mode of escape, imparts to the brain the horrible faculty of thought, of which the mind at rest can form no possible conception.

"I closed my eyes in despair, and commended my soul to God; but it was impossible for me to close my vision against the one great and absorbing idea in my mind—that of being burned up like a vile reptile that crawls in the weeds.

"My lids unclosed again, and as they did so, my eyes rested upon my trusty rifle; it was the first time I had thought of it, for the distance was great between me and my enemy; but now it looked like an old friend, and the only one that had power to save me. I embraced the thought that the sight of my rifle called up, with joy—a species of joy which is nearly overpowered by an antagonizing feeling.

"One chance still remained, a small chance it was true, but still a chance; and despair cannot completely paralyze the heart, while even one faint hope remains. I lifted the instrument upon which hung my destiny. As my glance ran over the intervening distance, I felt how desperate indeed was my prospect of life, for a hundred good marksmen might try their skill in vain, in aiming at an object so far off. Then I remembered that my weapon was of uncommon calibre and weight, and would throw a ball further than any I had ever seen. I recollected that I had loaded it that very day with uncommon care, and for a long shot.

"The Indian moved the torch, and was about to apply it to the combustible material; there was no time to lose. The rifle came to my shoulder quick and firm, and I braced up my nerves for a steady aim with a strong effort of the will. I looked through the double sights, and the muzzle covered the Indian's head. My heart seemed to stop

beating, held in the grasp of that terrible suspense. It was but an instant, then the rifle sent its ounce and a half of lead on its mission with a crack that was unusually loud and sharp, and a recoil which threw me back a few paces.

"The smoke curled away, but I dared not look. I passed my hand slowly across my forehead, for my brain was throbbing painfully. Every moment I expected to be greeted by the dense smoke from the burning prairie, and to hear the hissing of the rushing flame; but nothing of the kind occurred, and I ventured to look towards the spot where the savage had stood with his torch; I took courage, reloaded my rifle, and walked hastily towards the place.

"I reached it; the Indian lay upon his back, the brand, half extinguished, beside him; an ounce and a half of lead had passed through his head. I sank down overpowered with gratitude, and the various emotions which such an incident was calculated to inspire. That was the greatest shot I ever made, and probably shall never equal it again. Can you wonder that I am attached to the rifle?"

"Not at all," said the captain, earnestly. "I should never part with it, if it was mine."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ESCAPE OF WILSON.—THE FORT.

EARLY in the morning Captain Wilson and Lieutenant Cameron, leaving their horses with their companions, left the camp on foot to reconnoitre. Being well acquainted with the habits of their enemies, they apprehended little or no danger in such a movement, and soon separated.

Wilson struck off to the right, and pursued a north-westerly direction over a rough and uninviting country, often obliged to force his way through musquite-bushes so thickly matted with vines that it was a work of some difficulty to proceed. At length he reached a more open region, and was able to go forward with less exertion.

The wide rolling prairies, characteristic of the country between the Neuces and the Colorado, were no longer seen. The captain entered the narrow defile, and after following it for some time, ascended a sharp hill, at the foot of which lay a sluggish looking lake, with some sickly looking vegetation growing upon its margin. Near this sheet of water he discovered signs of a party of horsemen.

Upon a closer inspection he felt sure that the tracks were produced by the small feet of the mustang, commonly used among the Mexicans. To put the matter beyond doubt, he followed the tracks a considerable distance, and as the soil in the place was sandy, the impressions were quite distinct.

Having satisfied himself that they were made by a party of Mexicans, the captain of the rangers was about to retrace his steps, when the sound of horses' feet at full gallop caused him to turn his attention in another direction. Three Mexicans, mounted after the fashion of the country, upon mustangs, were advancing at the top of their speed. Two of the party had lassos in their hands, ready to throw with that terrible precision acquired by long and constant practice, while the third held an escopeta in such a manner, that Wilson was led to expect immediate acts of hostility.

They abated their speed as they neared the ranger, evidently fearful of the effects of the rifle which lay across his arm. Perceiving that a direct approach would be likely to prove fatal to one or more of them, they began to ride around him in circles, and at a considerable distance from each other, hoping to confuse him and so distract his attention, that the fellow with the escopeta might get within shooting distance; but this idea proved how little they knew of the disposition of the Kentuckian. So far from being embarrassed, or having his attention divided by their manœuvres, he beheld them with perfect calmness and self-possession.

He had been in many engagements and smelled gunpowder too often to be thus easily frightened. Momentarily the assailants lessened the diameter of their circles, shaking their lassos, shouting, and scattering the sand at a great rate.

Though the ranger dreaded the lasso, he resolved to bring down the fellow with the escopeta first, if possible, and then deal with the others as circumstances might permit. He patiently waited his opportunity as the circle narrowed; but the object of his mark

seemed to mistrust his intentions, and kept his mustang continually upon the move.

Tired at length with his continual watchfulness, he let the breech of his rifle fall to the ground, determined to suffer them to exhaust themselves with their efforts. Seeing him standing, calmly leaning upon the muzzle of his rifle, the Mexican checked his animal, and raised his weapon to his shoulder.

Knowing the Mexicans to be poor marksmen, and the distance being great, the ranger did not fear the result, and he tauntingly shouted to him to fire. He obeyed, and the ball struck the ground several yards from the captain. Cursing his poor powder and want of success, the Mexican scampered away to reload, leaving his companions to shout and threaten, and shake their lassos to their hearts' content.

In a moment the cowardly fellow returned, his courage somewhat increased by the report of his own weapon. It was now apparent that he intended to try his luck again, with the additional improvement of getting a little nearer. Urged on by the taunts and sneers of his companions, he gradually approached the Kentuckian. He stopped his mustang, leveled his escopeta, and threw himself forward in the saddle; but Wilson was too quick for him; he had not practiced rifle shooting for nothing in the wilds of "Old Kentuck." Before the finger of the Mexican had touched the trigger, a leaden messenger had pierced his heart; he sprang up into the air, and fell to the ground never to mingle again with the affairs of earth.

The mustang shook himself, smelled the body of his master, and with a snort shied away from the spot. But with Wilson the worst was to come; the fellows with the lassos would be upon him in a moment, and as his rifle was empty they had no more fear of it. He sprang to reload it as fast as possible, but before the powder had reached its place of destination, or the ball had followed it, a lasso was flying through the air, the fatal noose directed towards the captain's head.

He avoided it with a dexterous movement, and before he had well recovered himself for another exertion, the second lasso was suspended over him. He could not wholly evade it; it caught his right arm in the attempt to ward it off, and he was dragged several yards before he could extricate himself.

And now succeeded a terrible struggle for life and death; the skill with they handled those execrable instruments of strangulation, required all the agility, strength and presence of mind of the Kentuckian to prevent the object in view. He drew his pistol, but amid the rapid evolutions which he was obliged to make, it was difficult to use it with any kind of accuracy; and he only had the satisfaction of inflicting a slight flesh wound, which served to stimulate his antagonists to fresh exertions with their infernal lassos, which, despite all his efforts to the contrary, he began to believe they would eventually succeed in fastening upon his neck, when his fate was sealed; this object achieved, the mustang would be spurred into a gallop, and himself dragged at his heels until life was extinct.

With this tragical prospect in view, the joy of the ranger may be imagined, when in the scuffle and confusion, he caught a glimpse of Cameron looking through the double sights. Before he could breathe twice, the fellow most active with the lasso was knocked out of his saddle by an ounce and a half of lead, which crashed through his skull, scattering his brains in the face of his companion.

Struck dumb and powerless with surprise and horror, the latter became motionless in the very act of throwing his lasso. Wilson caught the other pistol from his side, and in a moment he lay beside his friend's body.

"God bless you, Cameron!" exclaimed Wilson, sinking exhausted upon the ground.

"Just in time," replied the lieutenant. "You were having a hard time with those infernal contrivances," he added, pointing to the lassos which were made fast to the saddles, and were now trailing upon the ground as the mustangs moved away and began to nibble at the tufts of grass that grew here and there.

"Alligators and snappin' turtles! I can deal with anything better than those lassos," said the captain, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"They are greatly to be dreaded when there is a proper field for their use," answered Cameron.

"What a relief it was to see you with that implement of death to your face," added Wilson. "I knew I was safe when I caught a glimpse of you looking along the sights; it was the most joyful emotion that I ever experienced, for I was dreadfully worried and put to my trumps, I can tell you."

"I can form a tolerable idea of it. I was placed in a situation somewhat similar myself. I was on a prairie between the Rio Frio and the San Miguel; I stood looking at the western skies, lost in a pleasing reverie. While in that position, I partially forgot myself, let my rifle slip from my grasp, and fall upon the grass at my feet. I did not immediately pick it up, and it was lucky that I did not, for before the lapse of three minutes, I saw a Mexican chap approaching at a fast gallop with his lasso ready to whirl at my head.

"The moment I put my eyes on him, I thought I could play 'possum a little. I did not as much as look towards my rifle, but dropped right down on my marrow bones, held up both hands, and begged for mercy in Spanish, with all the eloquence I could muster for the occasion. You see he thought I was unarmed, and advanced boldly, with an expression of malice upon his face that I shall never forget should I live to be as old as the most venerable of the patriarchs.

"I continued to cry out most piteously until he got pretty near me, when I caught my rifle from among the grass, and aimed it straight at his villanous countenance. It's my opinion that you never saw a fellow stop more suddenly than he did, and his dark visage grew as white as a pale-faced girl's. I let him enjoy the surprise for a few seconds, and then blazed away. If you should ever pass over that spot in this season of the year, you will find the prairie grass growing very rank there in a certain place six by two. I rode his mustang into camp that very hour, and that is the end of my story."

"And it's my opinion," answered the captain, "that we had better ride those animals yonder back to our brave lads."

"All right," said Cameron, and the mustangs were speedily caught and mounted. The one that had first been freed from his rider, had strayed a considerable distance; but Cameron found him and led him by the bridle; in this way they safely reached their companions before night, who had begun to feel alarmed at their long absence.

The following morning the party resumed their way, passing over the same ground which Wilson had traversed the preceeding day. After a hard ride they encamped on the margin of a small lake, near which was a tolerable growth of cypress, oak, and elm, and plenty of pasturage for the horses. While they were busily employed making preparations for passing the night as comfortably as the case would admit of, Ridgley suddenly appeared among them, mounted upon a stout horse, which gave unmistakable signs of being overridden.

Each man ceased operations in surprise, for no arrival could have been more unexpected. Ridgley threw himself from his steed, and beckoned Captain Wilson to approach.

"I bring news for you," he hurriedly said. "The enemy are all around you; you cannot go forward, and you cannot return. If you would save your lives, let each man take his axe and fall to work erecting a suitable defence. Cut down those oaks yonder and other trees of proper size, and build them up into a fort or something of that kind, which you know how to construct better than I can tell you."

"What makes you think the danger is so pressing?" asked the ranger.

"Because your enemies number more than a hundred, and are bent on your destruction. They are moving slowly towards you, confident that there is no way for you to escape," replied Ridgley.

"Can't we cut our way through them?" continued Wilson.

"No; it were folly to attempt it. Lose no time, but follow my advice."

"But they will starve us out," added Wilson.

"Perhaps assistance will reach you before that time," said Ridgley.

"What will you do?"

"I shall take care of myself, and possibly do something for you; at least it is better for one to perish than nine brave fellows. Shall you follow my advice?"

"I think I shall; it can do no hurt at all events to put ourselves in a state of defence. If no enemy appears after waiting a proper length of time, we can push forward again."

"But what good will you do by advancing further towards the enemy's country? The success of an expedition like this depends upon its secrecy. You, it would seem, are already discovered, consequently can effect nothing on account of your numbers."

"There is much reason in what you say," returned the captain. "If the enemy are really on our track, a part of our object is already baffled, unless we might manage to elude them, and leave them at fault."

"If you are attacked, I know you will make a brave defence, and hold out to the last," resumed Ridgley. "As for our friend Ethington, I trust we shall be able to serve him yet, if they have not already put him out of the way. But I must leave you. Adieu, captain."

Ridgley sprang to the saddle and clattered away as fast as the nature of the ground would admit.

"That's a brave fellow," said Wilson to Cameron, pointing after the retreating figure of the horseman. "He is every inch a soldier."

"Then he is a man for the times," replied the lieutenant.

"He is," was the emphatic rejoinder.

The two officers now consulted together for a few moments, and then the captain addressed his men as follows:—

"My bold lads, it would seem that the Mexicans are on every side of us in great numbers, and contemplate an easy victory over us, we being but a handful of men. The person who has just ridden away has brought the news, and he can be relied on. We must disappoint our enemies, if possible, and to do so we must erect some kind of a defence. Let every man of you fall to work with such implements as we may have, axes, hatchets, etc., and construct a log fort, in which we can use our rifles with good effect, while we are at the same time, protected from our enemies."

This short speech was well received, and the men instantly began to work. Such as had axes, felled trees, and others dragged their trunks to the spot selected for the rude structure, to which they intended to give the name of a fort.

The black and post oak were principally employed for this purpose, being locked together at the ends by notches upon each side, which gave firmness to the fabric. Leaving the work going on very rapidly, Wilson and Cameron went forth to reconnoitre, and bring in some game, if possible.

They made a long detour around the camp, but saw nothing to excite suspicion, and began to question the soundness of Ridgley's advice. They were fortunate enough to kill a deer, and returned to their comrades pretty well convinced that the danger had been overrated by their friend. But they thought it best not to express their views on the subject, and so fell to work and assisted the men.

Before the sun was up in the morning, they had the satisfaction of seeing their labors nearly completed. The walls were erected and the top covered over with green timber, which could not be easily fired. Notches had been cut in the logs previous to their being placed, which, when they were fitted into the structure at the proper height, gave the fabric the appearance of being pierced for loop-holes, after the fashion of more elaborate fortifications.

The Texan rifles were to play a conspicuous part through those rough apertures. The horses were next to be cared for, and it was unanimously agreed to lead them to the opposite side of the lake, where there was good pasturage, and let them shift for themselves. This proposal was duly carried into effect. The finishing touches were put to the fort, and the Texans were prepared for an enemy. Their numbers, all told, amounted to nine—the captain and lieutenant, six Rangers, and Felix. The men were in good spirits, and longed to test the superiority of their weapons over the fire-arms of the "blanketed nation," as they contemptuously called the Mexicans.

In asserting that the men were in good spirits, we perhaps ought to make one exception. There was one among them, evidently advanced in life, who had been in many skirmishes with the Indians, and who had never, as the saying is, "shown the white feather" on any occasion. He was a daring, iron-sinewed fellow, always the first in mirth and danger. But now the sound of his laughter was not heard; his jokes and sallies of wit no longer infused life into his companions; he worked on in silence. It was in vain that the men rallied

him; they brought forth no genial sparks; he was deaf to all their well-meant jests.

When the fort was completed he stood near the captain, contemplating it with a gloomy brow.

"Parker, you look sad. What ails you, man?" said Wilson, laying his hand in a familiar manner upon his shoulder.

"A strange feeling has fallen upon my spirits," replied Parker, in a low voice. "Every time I look at that fort we have built, I cannot shake off the conviction that I am looking at the spot where my grave will be dug."

"It's nothing, my brave fellow, but hard service and want of rest," returned the captain. "Sleep two hours, and you will wake up all right."

"No, captain, no sleep can take away the impression that my end is fast approaching. I have often heard of people having such a feeling when death was very near. Look there, captain, where the sun-shadow falls across the door of the fort; at this hour, on the morrow, it will rest on the mound that covers me. Don't think I am afraid, for I am not; I never was a coward, and I never was away from my post when there was fighting to be done, and never shall be while I can look through the sights; so don't attribute this feeling to weakness, but to the kindness of that great Being who does not wish to remove a sinful human being like me without warning, but gives him a chance to reflect a little on his past life."

"It's very singular," said Wilson.

"I grant it, but you will know by this time to-morrow," replied Parker, and the conversation dropped.

Hour after hour passed, and the men grew impatient, for there were no signs of the enemy. Both Cameron and Wilson feared they had wasted valuable time in useless labor, and resolved to move forward in the morning, if no enemy appeared. Just before sunset, all their doubts in regard to the expediency of what they had done, vanished. About an hundred mounted Mexicans appeared on all sides of them, except that bounded by the lake. The hearts of the boldest among the Rangers beat faster at beholding such overpowering numbers; they felt, and justly, too, that their case was a desperate one.

"Here's work for us, boys," said Cameron, calmly. "We must fight or die, and perhaps do both," he added.

"Felix," said Wilson, "can you use a rifle?"

"I can 'spress myself in dat line."

"Well, here is one; it belongs to your master—the bravest of the brave; see that you do not disgrace it."

"I shall 'luminate de subjeck ob makin' de daylight shine frough. I shall fight like the debbil."

The Texan Rangers silently took their places, and with trusty rifles grasped firmly in their hands awaited the assaults of their enemies.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CARCEL AT LAREDO.—THE MEXICAN MAIDEN.

We left Ethington in a critical position. His fate seemed inevitable. Armed men were drawn up in order before him, who waited but the word of command from their leader to terminate his existence; but that order was never given. The consultation among the three most prominent characters of the group ended, and hasty preparations were made for a march.

The whole party were soon in the saddle and moving forward in the direction of the Rio Grande. The sudden change in the aspect of affairs surprised our hero not a little. By some strange dispensation of Providence (for he was disposed to consider it providential), he had been snatched from the very jaws of death, and reserved for a destiny known only to the great Disposer of events.

He was placed on horseback with the rest, and strongly guarded. Wikoff and Cogswell kept a little in advance of the cavalcade, deterred either from shame or some other cause from keeping near Ethington, for which he was grateful; as their society would have been an infliction he could not have endured calmly. Whether Ethington felt that degree of gratitude to a higher power which most men under similar circumstances would have felt, we are not prepared to say; but it is certain that the startling incidents of the day produced a long train of

reflections, which were not without their beneficial results upon his mind.

He thought of Andrea with less bitterness, and his whole being was pervaded by a more forgiving spirit towards her. He was even disposed to regret his hastiness in leaving her so abruptly, without first seeking an explanation. The many imperfections in his own character had never appeared so palpable. Though his heart was softened by the spell of his better angel, his courage and natural energy of character were not yet subdued.

He felt within himself the same energy to overcome difficulties, or to meet a foe, that had heretofore characterized him and given him the name (among his enemies) of the "Texan Bravo," an appellation which, though not entirely deserved, could very well be applied to him; for the Texan soldiery was considered by the Mexicans as little better than organized bands of banditti and villains, and our hero the most daring and desperate among them.

While he rode on in thoughtful silence, he often heard himself made the subject of conversation by those around him, and had the honor of knowing that he was considered a dangerous man, and as sanguinary in his disposition as any bravo that ever walked the streets of Venice in times long gone. Before the expiration of the day, he learned that they were on the way to Laredo, a Mexican town on the east bank of the Rio Grande, destined to figure somewhat, some time after, in the annals of the Mier expedition.

Leaving a large post oak bog (in which General Somerville afterwards got mired with his seven hundred and sixty men, horses and packs) on the left, they pushed rapidly forward, and reached Laredo after three days' travel. During this time Ethington was treated with as much kindness as he had reason to expect from such people. The moment that they drew rein at Laredo, he was thrust into a carcel, damp and dirty as any of its size to be found in the interior of the enemy's country. He was not only incarcerated, but heavily ironed and poorly fed. When he had been a few days in the carcel, he was visited by Wikoff and the alcalde. The former had recovered from the effects of the wounds he had received at Bexar, and was now ready to engage in new schemes, as well as to carry out the plans which he and Cogswell had concocted on the banks of the Neuces. The threatening scowl which had always appeared upon his brow whenever he confronted Ethington, seemed to have grown deeper and more menacing in its expression since they last met.

"*Buenos dios, senor*," said Wikoff.

"I hope you will always speak that language," remarked Ethington.

"Why so, *caballero*?"

"Because you have forfeited all right to your mother tongue," replied our hero."

"Do you know why I have come to you in this carcel?"

"I have no desire to know."

"I will tell you—I am going to see Miss St. Aubert."

"Indeed!"

"*Si senor*, and that is not all."

"Well."

"I shall bring her to Laredo."

"If you can."

"That will not be difficult. I can do it without consulting her wishes, if I choose."

"What shall you do when you have brought her here?" asked Ethington, striving to keep down the indignation which the insulting manner of Wikoff was fast exciting.

"So shrewd a person as yourself, I should think, might imagine the rest; but as you choose to be so stupid, I will try to aid your perceptions a little," added Wikoff, his eyes sparkling with fiendish satisfaction. "I shall be wedded to Miss St. Aubert on the very hour of our arrival, and you shall witness the ceremony."

Ethington looked at his manacled hands, and then at the malicious face of Wikoff; he was regretting that his limbs could not be at liberty for one moment only. Wikoff seemed to divine his thoughts, and was pleased that his taunts had the desired effect.

"I am aware," he resumed, with provoking coolness, "that you have yourself aspired to the honor of Miss St. Aubert's hand—a happiness which is in reserve for me only. I am a man of feeling; I pity you, I'm sure. It will be a consoling reflection, and serve to beguile the tedium of a long hour, to know that the woman whom you have loved is about to be wedded to one who has rendered you such important services as the individual now before you has had the pleasure of

doing; also that the fair bride will soon be near you."

Walter was too full to reply. The name of Andrea called up emotions which made him truly wretched. Every word connected with her stung him to the quick. No species of annoyance and torture could have been more successful than that adopted by Wikoff; and the latter perceived the fact, and congratulated himself upon his cunning. He left the carcel, well satisfied with the pain he had inflicted, and resolved to render his suffering still more intense.

Although Walter had been willing to believe a short time before that Andrea had possibly given Wikoff some encouragement, and perhaps some trifling mark of favor, a revulsion now took place in his mind, and he was strongly inclined to the opinion that he would be obliged to trust more to stratagem to bring about his wishes, than to the usual mode of wooing a fair lady.

Knowing him to be a villain, and wholly unfit to be the companion of one like Andrea, notwithstanding her infidelity to himself, Ethington now felt an eager desire to escape in order to baffle him in his designs, if for no other reason. In the event of his effecting this object, if he should be able to discover that Miss St. Aubert had really entertained any friendly feelings towards him, he would contrive some way to warn her of her danger, and thus discharge a duty which he felt that he should owe to any female similarly situated.

Ethington's unexpected meeting with Andrea had called up many emotions which he had known in the past. When the first shock of surprise consequent upon that unexpected meeting had passed away, and he had thought calmly and rationally upon the subject, he was quite sure that he had judged too hastily in regard to any connection which she might have had with Wikoff's object in being near her on the night of the attack upon Bexar. Without pausing to notice the different phases of thought and feeling which agitated him by turns, we will reiterate the fact that he was now fully determined to make strong efforts to regain his liberty.

The next time the turnkey visited him he complained of his chains—that they hurt his wrists and ankles, and needed to be more skillfully adjusted, or changed for others less objectionable. By dint of fair words he prevailed upon the turnkey to send the blacksmith to examine the obnoxious portions of chain, and if he thought proper, to make the desired alteration. So much being conceded, he hoped he should be able to manage the rest without difficulty. The smith came, and was left with our hero.

"Well, senor, what's wanting?" he asked, throwing some of the more common implements of his trade upon the floor. For a reply, Ethington managed to get his hand in his vest pocket and take out a piece of money.

"My jewelry does not fit well," he said, with a significant smile. "You will oblige me by taking out those iron rivets and putting lead ones in their places."

"*Jesu*, senor!" exclaimed the smith, apparently horrified at the proposal.

"It is easily done," added Ethington.

"Ah, *Dios!*" he added, not forgetting to pocket the money. "What would be done to me, if I should be discovered?"

"There is no need of being discovered," continued Walter.

"But if they should chance to come in and catch you with your chains off? *Gracios a Dios!*"

"That they will not do. I will be careful."

"I should be shot in the *plaza; si, por cierto*"—yes, for certain.

"*Tonteria*—nonsense; you will die in your bed, with your friends all around you. See, I have more of the dust."

The turnkey entered and interrupted this interesting conversation.

"*Mi Dios!*" cried the smith, pretending to examine the chains. "These things must be fixed; *precicoes*,—it is necessary; they will kill him. I will go and get some more suitable implements and return."

With a significant wink at Ethington, the iron-worker left the carcel to come back after the lapse of half an hour, duly provided with leaden rivets, which were properly placed, according to our hero's wishes.

It was about dark when these operations were completed, and after receiving a liberal reward, the smith departed with a pleasant good-night. The outer door of the carcel had scarcely closed upon him when Ethington's jewelry was lying harmlessly beside

him. So far all had gone well; other steps were now considered, and he lay awake a long time during the night, concocting various plans of escape, very few of which, upon mature consideration, appeared feasible.

When the turnkey brought him his black bread and water the next morning, he was still undecided. While he was examining the carcel, and puzzling his brains for expedients, a Mexican female was ushered into his cell. The turnkey drew back, closed the door, and the two persons thus left *cara a cara*, regarded each other with profound embarrassment. The young lady was very pretty, and wore the silken *ribosa*, that covered her neck and shoulders with charming grace.

"Good morning, senorita," said Ethington, in the language of the country, and bowing very low.

The bright-eyed beauty blushed like a peony, and gathered her *ribosa* more closely about her comely person.

"You are an American?" she said, or rather asked, timidly.

Walter replied in the affirmative, and with a smile politely pointed towards the only seat in the cell.

"*Ave Maria!*" she added, glancing about the little cell. "What a close place, and what irons they have put upon you, senor!"

"They are very ungraceful, senorita. Should you be afraid of me if I should take them off?"

"No, senor," replied the fair visitor, coloring. "I think not—why should I?"

"Sure enough, why should you?" said Ethington. "Now, fair *doncella*, tell me what you wish; or more properly, the object of your visit."

"Not to harm you, senor," replied the maiden.

"Ah! I can well believe that," answered Walter. "The heart of kind women is the same all over the world. When she visits the prisoner, it is usually to do the work of an angel of mercy."

"*Muchisimas gracias*—thank you; it is kind of you to say so. Do you know any of the Texan Rangers?"

"I know them well; I have fought side by side with them many a time."

"There is one among them"——

The maiden hesitated and looked down.

"I read part of your secret, I think. There is one among them whom you know," added Walter.

"*Si*, senor."

"Perhaps he is fond of you," continued the other, softly. "May I ask his name?"

"Cameron," said the maiden.

"Lieutenant Cameron—a brave fellow; and he is honorable, too. If he has made any promises, he will keep them."

"*Bueno*," she said, and seemed well pleased. "But tell how you came here. I will sit down here and listen very patiently; I shall not be tired."

And Carmencita—for that was her name—sat down and remained quiet, while Ethington leaned against the wall, and told her how he was captured, together with some of the principal events in his history.

"You were at the Alamo, then?"

"I was, *doncella*."

"You saved a young man's life there?"

"I did."

"That was my brother," said Carmencita.

"How fortunate that I did so; because it saved you so much grief."

"And saved your life?"

"Yes."

"And shall save it again," added Carmencita, firmly. "I love him very much, and I am grateful to you, because you saved his life. I am so sorry that you are so unhappy. Was this Andrea you have spoken of, so very cruel and deceitful?"

Ethington sighed and remained silent.

"You look very sad; it was wrong of her to deceive you. But let us think of getting you out of this gloomy carcel."

"I am not averse to that; though having formed so agreeable an acquaintance, I am not so anxious in that respect as I was."

"You may be obliged to stay here sometime yet to enjoy it," replied Carmencita,

with a laugh. "But you must be patient; I may not be able to do anything for you in one day, or two perhaps, yet you are safe."

"I seem to be safe," said Walter, looking at the damp stone walls.

"Yes, but not in that sense. You shall be at liberty before a week. Remember that I am your friend and protectress. Colonel Savriego is expected here daily."

"And who is Colonel Savriego?" asked Walter.

"*Mi padre*—my father," answered Carmencita. "When he returns to Laredo, you shall be set at liberty, and before that time, if possible."

Ethington expressed his thanks in graceful terms, and saw with a sigh the door of the carcel shut out the charming figure of his new friend. Misanthrope as he had been, and still was, he was not insensible to the worth of the other sex. He felt that it was an amelioration of his sufferings to have the sympathy of one gentle heart; and if he sighed when the dark-eyed Carmencita passed from his sight, he was sadder when he could no longer hear the light echo of her footsteps.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE "RASCALLY WORLD."—THE ESCAPE FROM THE CARCEL.

THE life of a prisoner is a dreary one under the most favorable circumstances. An unconquerable desire to be at large, and master of his own actions, takes possession of him night and day. The dark walls grow darker every hour, and his chains more irksome. He envies the birds their freedom, and sometimes feels that he would exchange places with the humblest insect that creeps through the crevices of his prison."

Despite an occasional visit from Carmencita, Walter felt depressed, and a rapidly increasing desire to escape. The idea was ever present, and fixed itself most deeply upon his mind, that Andrea was in danger. He could not exorcise this anxiety by reverting to her infidelity to him. The truth that she was still dear to him could not be wholly disguised. He owed her the same kind offices that he owed to all human beings. If she were in danger, it was his duty to warn and save her, even as he should do for any female under heaven. That she was in danger, he was now fully convinced; the threats of Wikoff had proved as much.

But he was in prison; he could not fly to warn and aid her. Reflections of this nature will serve to explain the great secret of his impatience. But we would not convey the idea that he hoped aught from Andrea; for he did not. To him she was dead, and there could be no resurrection.

One day the turnkey thrust another prisoner into his cell. His plea for doing this was that the carcel was full, and there was no alternative. Ethington expostulated, but it availed nothing.

"He is a very harmless fellow," said the turnkey; "and you will like him. He is so peaceable that I put no irons upon him, you see. Ah, *Dios!* I wish they were all as docile."

If the new-comer was "docile," his appearance greatly belied him; for Walter, after a hasty scrutiny, determined that a more ugly looking fellow never respired within the four walls of a prison. He was a Mexican, and seemed to have been picked from among the lowest of the robber hordes that infest the dark valleys and gloomy mountains of Mexico. His face, that portion of it not lost in a wilderness of dirty black beard, was frightfully seamed with scars, received, he only could tell where and under what circumstances.

His apparel had been rich and showy in its day, with the full complement of silver buttons and red stuffs; but its gaudiness had long since passed away, and it now exhibited only a large amount of filth and raggedness. He had a strong odor of *vino mascal* and was enjoying a *cigarillo* at the moment of his entry.

"He's as gentle as a lamb," added the turnkey.

The fellow drew forth his cigarillo, grinned horribly, and bowed.

"What's his crime?" asked Walter, not at all liking the *tout ensemble* of his prison-mate.

"He is suspected of holding treasonable communication with *los Americanos*," said the turnkey, and retired.

The worthy gentleman took possession of Ethington's couch of straw without ceremony, and smoked away at the stump of his cigarillo with admirable nonchalance, eyeing our hero all the while with much attention.

"Will you have a *cigarro?*" he asked.

Walter declined the proffered civility.

"Ah! *lo bue es el mundo*! ah, what is the world?" he exclaimed, in a sentimental way, though in a voice far from musical. "It's a miserable world," he added, "a very rascally world."

"Perhaps so," replied Walter.

"I know it is," resumed the fellow; "I shouldn't be here, if it were not so; *no se*, senor."

From the instant Ethington saw this man, he had felt a conviction within him that his object in coming there was not a good one; that (to be plain) some evil was meditated against himself. His sinister expression, a certain villanous twinkle in the eye, his easy devil-may-care familiarity, all tended to strengthen his suspicions, and put him upon his guard.

"I have heard, senor, that you are a desperate fighter," he remarked, after a silence of several minutes.

Walter thought it best to encourage this idea, and therefore replied:—

"Yes, I am a match for three Mexicans."

"You must be very strong. What do you eat?" said the new-comer, with a shrug of the shoulders, and a facetious expression.

"Raw flesh!" answered Walter, gruffly.

"What kind, senor?"

"I prefer tender Mexican," replied Walter.

"*Mi Dios!*" exclaimed the fellow, with a scowl. "*Los Americanos* are cannibals! Well, I have heard so. Do you love to fight?"

"Prodigiously!" said Walter. "If these chains were off, I should like to try it with you."

His prison-mate perpetrated a strange laugh resembling the growl of a young bear.

Walter's suspicions were now fully awakened, and he resolved to watch the Mexican closely. In order to do so, when he believed himself unobserved, he closed his eyes after a little time, and feigned sleep. The prisoner addressed him, but Walter made no reply.

"I have fought in many places, senor," he said; but there was no response. "I have received my share of wounds, too. I have deserved well of my country, and you see how I am rewarded. As I said before, it is a rascally world."

Walter's breathing was deep and natural. His chest heaved as a sleeping person's chest should; but his eyes were not quite closed. It was near the hour of night; the sun's beams were receding rapidly from the prison, and made but a faint track of light across the bars of the grated windows. The first mist of twilight came stealing in.

"You are bad company, senor; I believe you are sleeping." Our hero respired heavily, and made a slight spasmodic movement, as sleeping persons are apt to do.

The man laid aside his sombrero, which he had worn till now, threw aside the short stump of his cigarro, and scrutinized Walter's features particularly. As he bent forward to get a better view, the latter perceived the handle of a small dagger concealed beneath his frock. Suspicion now deepened into a conviction amounting almost to a certainty. Walter yawned heavily, and brought his hands into a position where he could suddenly cast off the iron clasps from his wrists.

The new-comer relapsed instantly into a listless posture; but when our hero feigned to slumber soundly again, his former vigilant expression returned. He arose noiselessly to his feet, and laid his hand upon his breast over the dagger. But he hesitated; a certain kind of fear seemed to hold him fast and root him to the spot.

Possibly the reports which he had heard of the strength and courage of the man before him made him falter in his purpose. The strange words of Walter might have had their effect. The natural ferocity of his nature began to triumph over his scruples. Before him was work in keeping with the events of his past life. To him there was an excitement in the shedding of human blood that possessed an infernal charm. He grasped the weapon whose silver hilt peeped from his bosom and glistened in the feeble light. His large chest was agitated with the powerful emotions at work within him, and Walter could discern its unnatural heavings. His nostrils dilated; his lips were compressed upon his teeth; his eyes flashed like glowing furnaces. He thrust one foot forward, and stood on tip-toe. The weapon was drawn forth, another step was made, and the assassin's breath was concentrated in his lungs for the fatal stroke.

Walter suddenly arose to his feet, grasped his chains firmly in his hands, swung them aloft, and brought them down upon the head of the villain with all the power of his muscular arms. The effect was instantaneous and decisive. The assassin was crushed to the floor with the force of the shock, and lay motionless and senseless. The weight of the chains, and the strength applied, might have prostrated a wild buffalo upon the prairies.

Ethington immediately transferred his irons to his fellow-prisoner, and secured him as effectually as he could. While he was performing this friendly office, a small whistle rolled from the Mexican's pocket.

"No doubt this has called your fellow-rogues together many a time," said Walter, taking it from the floor. "Perhaps," he added, after a little reflection, "I may make it useful."

The assassin began to show signs of life, and Walter thrust a handkerchief in his mouth to keep him quiet. He then divested him of his frock or tunic in the best way he could, with the assistance of the dagger. He transferred the garment to his own person; and shortly after the trowsers, silver buttons, grease and all, changed owners in a similar manner, while the broad sombrero graced his brows.

The assassin now gave indications that he was sensible of what was taking place. He attempted to rise, but was disagreeably baffled by the jewelry.

"This is a bad world, senor, a very rascally world!" said Walter, quoting the language of his "docile" friend. "People are so ungrateful," added Walter. "See what you get by serving your friends. Ah, capitan, the world is full of ingratitude!"

The man shook his fetters desperately, and growled down his throat.

"I hope your employers paid you something beforehand, for I dare say they would not scruple to cheat such a peaceable fellow as yourself. I hope, also, that you saw a priest before you came on this ugly business. I am strongly tempted to try this dagger's edge. You would oblige me by indicating the precise spot where that organ representing the human affections is supposed to be located."

By close scrutiny, Walter was able to perceive that the villain was excessively terrified, really believing that his last hour had come; for in his opinion a desperate fellow, like the Texan Bravo, would not pass over so good an opportunity to gratify his sanguinary disposition. He would have begged humbly, abjectly for his life, had his tongue been at his command; but as it was, he could only lift up his manacled hands in mute entreaty.

Walter now resolved to make an experiment which possibly might be the means of regaining his liberty, and perhaps, on the contrary, might add to the rigor of his imprisonment. He placed the whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast. In a short time he heard steps approaching, and presently the door of his cell was opened by the turnkey. Walter drew the sombrero over his eyes, and jostled him in such a manner, while he was entering, as to knock the light from his hand.

"It is done," he whispered; "let us go."

"*Jesu*, senor! So soon?" exclaimed the turnkey.

"Yes, it is all over; come away." And Ethington caught him by the arm, and hurried him along the corridor of the carcel towards the little court opening upon the street. They stood before the large door of the prison; the keeper fumbled in his girdle for the key, but, it being totally dark, tried several before he found the right one. They passed into the court, and a gate was yet to be opened.

"Was it easily done?" asked his conductor, as he placed a key to the lock.

"Quite," said Walter. "One blow, and all was over."

"Life is very short," moralized the keeper.

"Very; and changeful, too," answered Walter.

The key had already turned in the lock of the outer gate, when the first rays of the moon, which had just risen, fell across Walter's face.

"*Ah, Dios!* whom have we here?" exclaimed the keeper.

For a reply, Walter knocked him down, and pushing open the gate, ran from thecarcel as fast as possible.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ATTACK ON THE FORT.

THE night drew on apace and flung its silent shadows over the land of the "Lone Star." Prairie, lake and chapparel were wrapped in the dreamy mists of the hour. The gentle winds had departed with the sun, and left the leaves at rest. The wild melody of birds floated no longer upon the fragrant air. The little lake near the fort seemed to slumber in the stillness.

"Men," said Wilson, "a serious contest is before us, but we are well protected by these rough, yet firm walls of wood. We have for a long time been trained to war, and each of us knows what is required of him in a case like this. In our hands we hold the weapons which have sent terror among our enemies more than once. No men living understand the art of using them better than we. The Texan Rangers are well known and dreaded, and we will not throw a stigma upon their well-earned reputation. Yonder you can discern the bivouac of our foes; they are cowards when matched with equal numbers, and revengeful when the superiority of numbers gives them an advantage. They will destroy us to a man, if they can, and the fate of the defenders of the Alamo and of Goliad tells us what we may expect. Let us remember that we were at San Jacinto, and do our duty to the last. Surrender, we will not; I, for one, would sooner perish where I stand."

"And I also," said Cameron; "and I also," responded every one.

"Shall we wait for them to attack us?" asked Wilson, "or shall we give them a taste of our metal? They are within reach of us, as you will perceive."

"Perhaps we had better keep quiet until they make a demonstration," replied Cameron.

"They are preparing to do it now," returned Wilson. "See—a small party have mounted their mustangs to see what they can make of us at a nearer point of view. They are armed with carbines and escopetas, I should judge. They hope the darkness will render their bodies rather indistinct marks for our rifles. They expect to draw our fire at but little personal hazard, and thus determine our strength."

"That is no doubt their intention," replied Cameron.

"See if you can count them," added the captain.

"There are about fifteen advancing. I wonder how many empty saddles will return; it would be interesting to know. I wish the moon would hurry up. How still it is! Such a hush as this frequently precedes storms. I would give something to know what those fellows are thinking of. Perhaps the fear of death has already fallen upon some of them with all its chilling mystery."

Parker, who was standing near Cameron,

turned towards him with a strange though quiet smile, faintly discernible in the feeble light which crept in through the pierced walls.

"I should think they might feel some dismal forebodings. If there are indeed presentiments, they should have them; for they are so near their dissolution," added Wilson, impressively, "that the angel of death might crush them with his wings as he flies over."

"I will pick off the leader," said Cameron. "Good heavens! how tardy the moon is!"

"We can see well enough to answer our purpose, I think. Now, men, if you can cover an object with your steel barrels, let your barkers speak up sharp and disturb the digestion of some of those fellows! Cameron, give yonder chap an ounce and a half."

"It shall be done, captain," said the lieutenant.

"Go yer de'th, Massa Kentuck," added Felix.

"I can cover him," added Cameron.

"Then give it to him."

A single report broke the silence; the foremost saddle was emptied, the party drew up suddenly and were motionless for a brief space; but that brief space was enough. The Rangers instantly pounced in their fire, with what effect they could not well judge—for the darkness of the hour and the smoke served to cover the retreat of the survivors—but it was quite certain from the speed with which they returned to their companions, that the ammunition had not been wasted.

This prompt and probably unexpected repulse checked the ardor of the assailants for the time being, and the Rangers began to believe that they shouldn't be molested again during the night; but they were doomed to disappointment. Just before the dawn of day there was a general assault upon the fort. Advancing upon all sides, save that towards the lake, they discharged their carbines, and received the fire of the Texans. Some of them reached the fort and clambered upon the flat roof; others passed them up dry sticks and every combustible material that they could obtain. After several attempts, a dense smoke curled up from the roof, and presently a flame, which soon streamed up into the skies, reflecting fantastic shadows upon the lake.

During the time occupied in producing this result, the Rangers had not been idle; they had employed their weapons with deadly effect; but the darkness that is always the precursor of day, proved their enemy.

"They can't reach us," said Wilson, "unless they burn us out—and these logs are too green to afford them much chance of that."

"They begin to give back," remarked Cameron. "The Texan rifles terrify them. Hark! what was that?"

"I heard nothing new," replied Wilson.

"I smell fire!" exclaimed Cameron. "Look up! they have kindled a fire over our heads. The infernal heathen wish to burn us alive."

"Keep cool—they can't do it!" cried Wilson. "The logs are too wet to burn—it will go out of itself. Give it to them, men—be lively—blaze away wherever you see their heads—be sure that every shot tells."

"The 'Lone Star' forever!" shouted the Rangers.

Wilson paused and looked anxiously up; the fire was indeed spreading.

"I thought it was too green to burn," he observed, while a painful shade of anxiety crossed his face.

"Green wood makes the hottest fire when fairly started," said the lieutenant. "They have kindled it with dry sticks and bark."

"Look a heah, Massa Kentuck," observed Felix. "Just let dis darkey feller out, and he'll fix de fire in no time, and perhaps less dan dat."

"Nonsense, Felix! they'll fix you more likely," returned the captain.

"I isn't a good mark, massa cap'en," he answered.

"And why not?" asked Wilson.

"'Kase I's so near de cullor ob de night," rejoined the African.

"They'll see the whites of those two eyes," remarked Cameron.

"I wasn't 'dressin' myself to you!" said Felix, with dignity.

"I fear to let you venture out," added the captain.

"I'll spress myself and luminate de nature ob de subjeck; I'd rudder be shot dan to burn, Massa Kentuck; dat is de pecooliar state ob my indervidooal senterments."

"What can you do out there, Felix?" asked Wilson, after looking again anxiously at the flames, which were fast increasing in volume.

"Frow off de combustionable sticks, and pitch de Mexicans to de debbil," replied Felix, firmly. "Now open de door and let me out quick, for de flames begin to promulgate like tinder."

Wilson cast one more hurried glance upward, and then said:—

"Go, and if you are killed, we shall lose one of the best niggers in the world."

"Let me look out in that direction before you unbar the door," said Cameron. "Now's your time—all clear—let him out," he added, immediately.

"Ay," said Wilson, "open it is—go it, Felix."

"Go yer de'th!" cried the latter, and dashed out into the open air where the bullets were flying like hailstones. In a moment he had grasped the ends of the projecting logs, and drawn himself to the roof. Two of the enemy were still there, feeding the flames with dry sticks and bark, which their comrades threw up to them. The African sprang towards them with irresistible fury; one he felled with his fist, and the other he caught in his athletic arms and threw from the roof as he would have thrown a billet of wood; another moment, and he was scattering the blazing brands in all directions.

A loud shout arose from the Mexicans, and a shower of balls whistled about him as he spun the flaming material away with his foot. The task was done; the negro swung his old hat in the air, shouted at the top of his voice—"Go yer de'th, yer debbils!" leaped down, and was instantly pulled into the fort by Wilson and Cameron.

"Heaven bless your woolly head!" exclaimed the captain. "There's considerable of the Kentucky alligator about you, after all. You're a brave darkey, and I'll bear that in mind."

"'Spress yerself—pile it on," said Felix.

It being near dawn, the enemy made no further attempt to fire the fort, but kept up a continual discharge of carbines and escopetas, covering themselves as much as possible behind trees, rocks and shrubbery to guard against the fatal effects of the Texan rifles. The chapperel served their purpose very well, and the firing was most frequent in that direction. Occasionally a bullet would find its way through a crevice, and its strength being spent, roll harmlessly upon the ground, or strike the opposite wall with feeble force.

The Rangers were impatient for the daylight, that they might use their weapons with more fatal results. The darkness melted away before the approaches of the sun. The red light swept along from the ruddy east, and revealed the scene of the contest.

Several figures were discovered lying upon the earth whose eyes received no light, and whose bodies felt no warmth from the dazzling beams. They had fallen in the conflict; their ears were deaf to all earthly sounds, and the passions which had hurried them to their fate were extinguished forever.

Parker stood near Wilson reloading his rifle, which he had just discharged. The latter turned to the former with a good-natured smile.

"You see that your presentiments amounted to nothing," he remarked. "I hope you feel quite well, now?"

"It is not noon yet," was the calm reply. "If I should fall, bury me here, and say to my friends that I did my duty."

Parker ceased speaking, and threw his ramrod upon the ground. In the very act of placing a cap upon the tube, a ball struck

him upon the breast; he staggered, and Wilson caught him as he was falling.

"It's in my lungs," said Parker.

The captain tore open his vest, and the blood was bubbling slowly from a wound in the right breast. Wilson had seen many wounded men, and knew by the peculiar red color of the vital current that it came from the lungs.

"Don't mind me," added Parker. "You can employ yourself better; it's of no use. I knew it would come to this."

The kind-hearted ranger did what he could to staunch the blood, but it was a vain attempt. He placed some blankets under him, then returned to his post and encouraged the men, who were endeavoring to pick off those who had taken a position in the chapparel. It was certain death to him who exposed his person; an unseen messenger was sure to find him.

In a short time, Wilson was by Parker's side again. He was suffering intense pain; at every respiration, the blood sallied forth afresh.

"How do you find yourself?" asked the captain.

"It goes hard with me," said Parker.

"Do you feel as though you were going?" continued Wilson, taking his companion's hand.

"Sinking fast," murmured Parker. "I suffer much—I had hoped to go easier."

"Can I do anything—do you feel prepared?" added the captain.

"As well prepared, perhaps, as if I had been permitted to live longer. War is not a trade that fits one for heaven," was the reply, spoken with much effort.

"You have fought for your country," said Wilson.

"Yes, in the past; but now I am fighting with an enemy that cannot be conquered," replied Parker.

"The angel of death is strong," said the ranger, wiping his eyes.

"Yes, he tears me," added the dying man, painfully convulsed. "His fingers are at work here—here," laying his hand on his chest.

Cameron now drew near, and leaning on the barrel of his rifle, looked sadly upon the face of his comrade-in-arms.

"You see how it is," said Parker, in a faint voice. "I am paying the last debt; I'm bound to the unknown country; the last enemy presses hard on me."

"We are sorry to part with you," replied Cameron.

For a short time the dying ranger was unable to speak, and the angel tugged away at his brave heart. He then raised himself upon his elbow and said:—

"I'm going on the long march—a road which all the world must march over. I hear the tattoo of death—I go to my last quarters! God bless you—farewell."

Parker feebly pressed the hands of his companions, his lips moved as if in prayer—he looked at Wilson, smiled, and joined the great army which no man can number. An hour before noon they buried him there and the sun at his meridian crept in, and his beams lay across the grave. The enemy, having lost many of their numbers, observed much caution in their offensive operations during the day, but upon the ensuing night several determined assaults were made, which were promptly repelled by the Texans. Attempts were also made to fire the fort, but providentially their purpose was baffled by a shower. Finding that they gained nothing by this mode of warfare, the Mexicans now resolved to reduce the brave band by famine.

But little was now done on either side, and the assailants waited patiently for hunger to perform what mere force of arms could not. The Rangers saw with feelings of the deepest solicitude their little stock of provisions wasting rapidly away, and finally disappear. Their new enemy was now the most formidable. They suffered from hunger and thirst, particularly the latter.

"Something must be done," said Captain Wilson to Cameron. "Our brave fellows begin to suffer."

"I know it," replied the lieutenant; "and I have thought of a plan which may perhaps succeed."

"Let us hear it," replied the other.

"It is this. At dark, to-night, I will leave the fort and try to make my way to the other side of the lake where we left our horses. If fortune favors me, I shall reach Bexar and bring you relief. A few shots from our gallant boys would disperse yonder cowards."

"But it would be difficult to leave the fort without being shot down or taken. They evidently intend to starve us out, and are watching us as a cat does a mouse. It grieves me to see a brave man hazard his life in such a way, for the chances are against you."

"I am aware that it is a hazardous undertaking, captain; but one will be more likely to succeed than all of us. I am resolved to try," replied Cameron.

"No, I will go. I planned this expedition; I have led you and our companions into danger, and it shall be mine to make an attempt to extricate them."

"I will not consent to it," said Cameron. "I claim the right to incur the risk. Remember Marianna."

"I have thought of her. And there is a name you have spoken which I have not forgotten."

"Yes, Carmencita; but her remembrance must not deter me from duty—it should rather stimulate me to acts of heroism," rejoined the lieutenant.

Wilson ceased to press the subject further, and at night Cameron prepared to go forth on his mission.

"This rifle," he said, when ready to make the attempt, "I will leave with you, for if anything should happen to me, I should not like to have it fall into the hands of our enemies; it has done too much good service to merit such a fate. I will take this weapon that belonged to poor Parker. Now, my lads, let us shake hands all round, for we may never meet again."

"It is useless to tell you to be cautious," said the captain, "I know that you will exercise all the prudence that mortal man can. "If you shouldn't be successful, and we should never see your face again in time, what shall we say to Carmencita, should we happen to meet her by some singular chance?"

"That I was true to her to the last; that will be enough; she will know what it means," he replied.

"Word for word," responded Wilson.

"It is quite dark, now, and I need delay no longer," said Cameron.

The door was opened cautiously; the manly form of Cameron passed out, and all was still. They listened breathlessly, but no sounds came back to tell them of their comrade's fate. They ventured to hope that he had baffled the vigilance of the enemy and reached the opposite side of the lake in safety.

"I think I can see some object in the water," said one of the men.

"So can I," said Felix.

"Where?" asked Wilson.

The first speaker indicated the spot with his finger.

"I see!" exclaimed the captain, energetically. "It's Cameron; he is swimming across the lake. His rifle is lashed upon his back, and he strikes out boldly; but I fear this sudden burst of moonlight will betray him."

"He is still within gunshot of the enemy," added the other; "they could riddle him with their bullets in a moment."

"He's a strong swimmer," said the captain, "but I fear the chances are greatly against him. Hark! I hear the *centinela alerta* of the sentinels. Cameron has gone down; but he breaks water and appears above the surface again. He is yet undiscovered; I believe he will succeed."

The parties watched the brave swimmer, until he passed round a small headland and was no louger visible. From each heart there went up a silent prayer for his safety.

In the long catalogue of human miseries there is none more dreadful than the agonies of intense thirst. The Rangers had already begun to feel its horrors; lips were parched, tongues hot and dry. If they slept, they saw in their dreams delicious streams of water that mocked their thirst.

But necessity is the mother of expedients; with such implements as they had, the men began to dig a hole within their narrow pre-

cints. After much labor they had the pleasure of seeing the excavation gradually fill with dirty looking water; but they drank it eagerly and with grateful hearts.

Their courage now revived, and the enemy heard them cry *viva la Texas*, with an energy that surprised them. Wilson declared that the muddy liquid was the sweetest water he ever drank.

We will not follow the devoted band step by step in the sufferings which they experienced for the next two days. We will not describe their hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, nor paint the inroads of hunger upon constitutions naturally robust. But there were no murmurings heard. Stern resolution and defiance was written in legible characters upon every face. Each spoke hopefully, and no one thought of surrendering. Each remembered the fate of Travis and Bowie, Crocket and Fannin. Whenever the enemy came within range he instantly discovered the sight of a Texan rifle; and it was next to a miracle if he escaped.

On the night of the second day after the departure of Cameron, the assailants made a desperate attempt to storm the little fort. Believing that the Texans must inevitably be in a poor condition to fight, they resolved to defer the hour of triumph no longer.

The Kentuckian encouraged his companions, and determined to beat them back or perish. All was done that the most exalted courage could suggest, or the most dogged obstinacy inspire.

The men fought with the desperation of despair; but hunger had enfeebled them, and continued watching anxiety and exertion had wasted their energies in an alarming degree. None were more daring or efficient than Felix. He used his master's rifle with great effect, and manifested a spirit of determined bravery.

"My friends and comrades," said Wilson, "the worst has come. We must either beat them off, or never see another sun rise. They will probably overpower us at last; but we will die here and leave our bones to bleach beside those of poor Parker. Our countrymen will not forget us, and the Rangers will avenge our death. It is not so hard a thing to perish fighting for one's country as cowards imagine. The good soldier rises superior to pain; he feels but one slight pang and all is over."

"They are all around us," said one of the men. "We can keep them out but little longer; they will either burst in upon us, or burn us up."

"If the Rangers were only here," replied Wilson.

"We'll fight 'em to the death!" exclaimed the other.

"Here dey come like de debbil!" said Felix. "Good-by, Massa Kentuck."

The enemy were now attempting to force the door. At that instant, the surrounding country resounded with rifle shots, and the battle-cry of the "Lone Star" drowned the shouts of the assailants, and found many an echo among the hills and gorges.

"'Spress yerself! Go yer de'th!" cried Felix.

"The Rangers, by heavens!" exclaimed Wilson. "Thank God, boys, we are saved."

"Does ye hear dat?" added Felix, joyfully, as volley after volley was heard from the Rangers. "Dat's what does de good."

"Hurra for Texas and Old Kentuck!" shouted Wilson.

"The enemy are flying in all directions," said one of the men.

"Ob course," added Felix, positively. "Dey'd whip de debbil!"

"Here they come!" added the captain. "Open the door, men."

The door was quickly unbarred; and the brave fellows rushed out into the open air, and embraced their companions with feelings of joy and gratitude that no pen can describe.

"Where's Cameron?" cried Captain Wilson, as his brave company came dashing up towards him.

"He's here," said a voice, and Cameron himself pressed forward and grasped the outstretched hand of Wilson. "I met our noble lads on the way," he said. "Ridgley had already warned them of our danger, and they were hastening to our relief; but they would not have reached us in time to have

been of any service, if I had not fallen in with them and guided them on by the shortest and most practicable way. You need refreshment and rest, and, thank God, you can now sleep in safety!" he added, glancing proudly at the Rangers.

"Yes," answered Wilson with a smile of pride; "I can now sleep in safety, for I well remember how the Texan Rangers fought at San Jacinto, when we punished Santa Anna for his sins."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FINALE.

We left Walter Ethington running from the carcel. He had not proceeded far before the cries of the turnkey had turned out the guard and many of the citizens of Laredo. Our hero was surrounded just as he reached the *plaza*; for not being acquainted with localities, he had taken the wrong direction. He prepared for a determined resistance; but the guard were brought suddenly upon him at the charge of bayonet, and he was marched back to the carcel.

As he was conducted to his cell, he met the personage who had attempted his life. His head was bleeding profusely, and he had just been relieved of the "jewelry." He favored our hero with an expressive glance, and took occasion to remark with a malicious grin that it was "a very rascally world indeed!"

As it was his turn to triumph, Walter bit his lips with vexation, and made no reply. In a few moments he found himself established in his old quarters, and provided with a new set of irons much heavier than the former ones. It was useless to repine, and he bore his dissappointment with as much stoicism as possible.

Carmencita did not visit him for several days, and he began to wonder at her long absence. At length she came.

"I began to think you had forgotten me," he said, with a smile.

"No, senor; I seldom forget my promises; but you began to despair, it would seem, and so tried to escape without my assistance," she answered.

"I attempted to regain my freedom," returned Walter; "and I think you will pronounce the trial excusable, when you learn that I narrowly escaped assassination."

Walter then related the particulars of the incident which led to his futile endeavor to regain his liberty. Carmencita was greatly shocked at hearing this, and declared her determination to lay the matter before those whose business it was to look after such things.

"My father has returned to Laredo," she added; "and I have obtained an order for your liberation. In a few minutes you will be free from those irons."

While she was speaking, the smith appeared, and relieved him of his irons.

"I feel like a man again," said Ethington, as he spurned the irons away with his foot, and felt that he once more had control of his limbs.

"I sent information to Bexar by a trusty messenger," continued Carmencita, "concerning your condition. The bearer of my message was fortunate enough to meet those who were interested in your fortunes. They await you a short distance from Laredo. You will be conducted to them, and the debt of gratitude which I owe you, will in some measure, be liquidated."

"Fair Carmencita," replied Ethington, "how shall I express my thanks? And what shall I say to the brave Cameron?"

"Just what you please, senor," she answered; "except to tell him that he is not forgotten."

"He will be glad to hear from you; I am quite certain that I have heard him speak your name. Captain Wilson used to rally him about a dark-eyed senorita," said Walter.

Taking leave of Carmencita with many expressions of esteem and professions of friendship, he was provided with a mustang, and conducted from Laredo with great secrecy and despatch.

"Yonder are your friends," said the guide, after a gallop of an hour. "I need go no further."

Ethington rode forward, and in a few moments, to his surprise, beheld the tall figure

of Ridgley; and near him was Augustus Henrie, dressed as usual, and looking as foppish as ever. Our hero advanced and took the extended hand of Ridgley without reserve.

"Your efforts to serve me," said Walter, "have disarmed me of prejudice. I confess myself your debtor."

"The account may be balanced at your leisure," replied Ridgley, smiling.

"In relation to my young friend," added Walter, turning to Augustus Henrie, and taking his small, white hand, "I scarcely know what to say. You have served me with singular fidelity and disinterestedness."

"But never was so fortunate as to be much of a favorite," replied the youth, with a smile.

"I will be frank," rejoined our hero, with a slight change of color. "I will confess that I did not formerly feel very friendly towards you."

"You were inclined to think me rather foppish, I believe, Mr. Ethington," returned Augustus, good-naturedly.

"If I were ever so unkind as to do you injustice, I trust you will pardon me; for I regret my ingratitude very sincerely," resumed Walter.

"With pleasure, sir. With my smooth, beardless face and slight figure, it was perhaps natural that you should think me wanting in manly attributes; we will let that pass."

"I trust it will cure me of the foolish habit of judging by appearances," added our hero.

"I cordially hope so," said Ridgley, earnestly; "for the very habit has caused all your unhappiness."

"You allude to Andrea St. Aubert," replied Ethington, quickly, and with less cordiality. "Upon that subject you know we never agree."

"I have heard that you once loved my cousin Andrea," rejoined Augustus.

"You heard truly, my good youth. I loved her most devotedly; but do me the justice to believe that I would not have broken off the connection without sufficient cause."

"I have never sought your confidence," said Ridgley, "but I now ask you in the most earnest manner, and entreat you by any gratitude or friendship which you may now be disposed to feel towards me, to speak plainly, and inform me why you left my niece, Andrea, in the abrupt and strange way you did?"

"I will do as you desire," answered Walter, sadly. "Upon a certain evening I witnessed an interview between her and another lover. I saw them part with mutual tears and embraces. The sight maddened me past endurance, and I have not been happy since that fatal hour. Can you wonder at my misanthropy—can you reproach me that I am miserable?"

"He can do better than that," replied Augustus. "He can inform you that that young man was her brother, who was to leave her that very hour for college."

The party had dismounted and were standing near each other. At hearing this unexpected announcement, Walter's cheek grew ashy pale, and he turned his eyes wildly towards Augustus. Springing forward, he caught him by the arm, exclaiming:—

"What is this I hear? What strange words would you utter?"

The youth was much agitated, and unable to reply immediately, and Ridgley spoke.

"The lad speaks the truth. Andrea St. Aubert is pure as the angels. She is incapable of wronging you. Natures like hers are elevated far above deceit. An enemy has imposed upon you."

"Repeat what you have said," added Walter, shaking the arm of Augustus with considerable impatience. "I would hear it repeated from your lips."

"It is true—true as holy writ," stammered Augustus, greatly discomposed by the vehemence of Walter.

"And that man was her brother!" cried the latter, flinging the youth from him. "Then I have wronged Andrea St. Aubert past forgiveness; my headlong haste has made me the most unhappy of men. I have been duped, cruelly duped."

"You have," resumed Ridgley, "and Wikoff is the man. It was by his agency that you were induced to doubt her and seek

proof of her guilt. He sent the false friend to you who led you to the place of pretended meeting."

"It must be so," returned Walter.

"It appears to me," said Augustus, "that you were a little too precipitate. You should have seen my cousin Andrea, before you broke off the engagement. A word from her would have prevented all this long, protracted misunderstanding."

"Very true; but that time has passed and cannot be recalled. I can only lament my error, and punish the villain who has deceived me by cunning artifices."

The revulsion that took place in the mind of Walter was very great, as well as unexpected. To hear that Andrea St. Aubert was innocent, was a relief; but with the gladness consequent upon such a discovery, there was mingled much self-reproach and bitterness. He now saw that he had been deceived and wronged by an artful rival, and while smarting under the supposed grievances, had cruelly wronged one as dear to him as his own honor.

As he rode forward towards Bexar, accompanied by Ridgley and Augustus, and the half-dozen neighbors who had volunteered to assist the former, he was a subject of the deepest remorse.

"Did you really feel any friendship for Andrea?" asked Augustus, unconcernedly.

"That's cool!" said Walter, coldly. "You are not very deeply versed in matters pertaining to the affections."

"I don't care to be, if it makes people so desperate," retorted Augustus.

"Wait till your beard grows," added Walter, smiling.

"That will be a long time," added the youth, passing his hand over his smooth chin.

"I think so," answered our hero.

On the following day the party was agreeably surprised by meeting the Texan Rangers, who were moving towards Laredo, fully determined on Walter's release. It was a pleasant incident to our hero, for he felt a strong attachment for Captain Wilson and Lieutenant Cameron, as well as their brave fellows. Ethington was much affected at the recital of their sufferings, and the friendship they had manifested for him. The order to right about face was given, and the Rangers moved towards Bexar in the best of spirits.

Felix was nearly wild with joy, and found it exceedingly difficult to "'spress himself" on that occasion. Walter did not forget to have a long interview with Cameron, in which the name of Carmencita was often repeated, and the lieutenant appeared in excellent humor, while our hero was a greater favorite with him than ever before.

It was observed soon after the party had crossed the Neuces that Felix was nowhere to be seen, and his master began to feel anxious for his safety. Presently he joined them at a gallop, swinging his hat and much excited.

"Yah, yah! Heah, heah! I's gin it to him!" he exclaimed, with an uncommon exhibition of ivory and whites of the eyes.

"What have you done?" asked Walter.

"Killed de debbil!" replied Felix.

"Let us follow him," said Wilson; and the captain and Ethington spurred their horses after the African. In a short time the latter drew up on a piece of bottom-land or interval, to which the attention of the reader has been before directed. A man was lying upon the grass near the river. Walter threw himself from his horse and bent over him—it was Wikoff!

The pains of death had already seized him. There was a dark spot upon his forehead; a rifle ball had entered there, and the life drops were slowly oozing out.

"What means this?" exclaimed Walter.

"It means that I am dying," said Wikoff, in a faint voice.

"He's got de debbil, massa," said Felix.

"Served him right," added Wilson.

"Go yer de'th!" cried the African.

"Hush!" said Walter. "The man is dying."

"It grows dark—earth is fading away," said Wikoff. "I am not ready—would to God I could live for a day!"

"You'll be a corpse before five minutes," added Wilson, bluntly.

Wikoff tried to rise upon his elbow, but could not. His expression grew wild, and his eyes dim.

"Andrea St. Aubert is innocent; she loves you still," he said in a hollow voice.

These were his last words. Death stopped his utterance, and his eyes glossed over forever. Each stood silent a moment, as if listening to the sound of angel's wings, as he conducted away an erring soul.

"Thus ends the career of a villain!" said Wilson.

"Yes," replied Walter, with a sigh; "and may God forgive him."

"You manifest a more Christian disposition than I ever expected you would," returned the ranger, as they moved away from the spot.

As they rode to rejoin their friends, Felix turned in the saddle and shook his fist at the body of Wikoff.

"What made you do it?" asked Walter.

"Kase I had a chance," said Felix. "He has made trouble enuff. I've 'spressed de natur ob my convictions on dat subjeck. He 'sulted dis cullud pusson once on dat very spot."

"Do you think," said Walter to Augustus Henrie, "that I could have an interview with Miss St. Aubert?"

"For what purpose?" he asked.

"To confess my fault, entreat her to pardon me and say farewell. Will you be my messenger to Andrea?"

"I will," replied the youth.

"This very hour?" added Walter.

"This very hour," said Augustus.

"Go then, my good youth, and I will await your return here at camp. Do not keep me long in suspense, because my feelings during your absence will not be of the most enviable kind."

Promising to be expeditious, and use all his influence with Andrea, Augustus departed upon his mission. After the lapse of an hour, which seemed an age to Ethington, a colored servant brought a note from Mr. Ridgley, stating that Miss St. Aubert had reluctantly granted his request; and begged that the interview might be brief.

Our hero directed his steps towards Mr. Ridgley's mansion, agitated by emotions which no man in his senses could have coveted. He felt as a person might be supposed to feel who had committed some great crime, and on his way to the confessional to unburden his conscience.

How would Andrea receive him? How should he appear in her presence? Was there any hope that she would pardon him?

To none of these questions could he return a very encouraging answer. The man who fought at San Jacinto trembled violently when he entered the dwelling of Mr. Ridgley. He was conducted to the parlor and kept waiting a few minutes in a state of trepidation bordering on insanity.

He heard the door open and light footsteps advancing; he ventured to raise his eyes, and Andrea St. Aubert stood before him. She had lost nothing of that dazzling beauty which distinguished her from all others of her sex. Walter averted his gaze, and was too much embarrassed to speak immediately.

"I have presumed," he stammered, "Miss St. Aubert, to solicit an interview."

Andrea made no answer.

"I have come to confess my error. I do not expect you to forgive me, but I wish you to witness my contrition, and hear me avow how deeply I regret what has happened."

"Augustus has told me all," replied Andrea, striving to suppress her emotions.

"I have suffered much," said Walter.

"I know it, Walter, and I freely forgive you. You were more sinned against than sinning," said Andrea, in a gentle voice.

"I thank you from the depths of my heart for this condescension!" exclaimed Walter. "You will forgive me, then?"

"For the sake of Augustus," said Andrea.

"But your kindness is limited to a certain extent; it leaves me nothing to hope from your love, and I did not expect it," resumed Walter.

"To please Augustus," added Andrea.

"Dare I believe what I hear?" he ex-

claimed, advancing and taking Andrea by the hand.

"To please Augustus," repeated Andrea, smiling.

The next moment—no, that will not do; the blushes of my heroine shall be spared. I have no right to describe what ensued. Who will dare to embrace the mistress of his heart after a reconciliation, if it is to be put in print and pass before the optics of a hundred thousand readers? It is not fair; such moments of rapture belong wholly to those who experience them.

"As you have done so much to please Augustus," said Walter, after an interval of silence, "be good enough to send for him, that I may thank him as he deserves."

Andrea wiped the happy tears from her eyes, and left the room. In a short time Augustus and Mr. Ridgley appeared.

"In you I have had an exellent advocate," said Walter, embracing the youth warmly. "Through your intercession, I have been made the happiest of men."

"It's a pity I am such a dandy," rejoined Augustus.

"I thought you had forgiven and forgotten that," added Walter, with a smile. "Where's Andrea? I wish to see you both together."

"You shall," said Augustus; and instantly throwing off his cap and outer garments, our hero saw Augustus and Andrea in one.

"Andrea St. Aubert!" exclaimed Ethington, recoiling with surprised. "Is it possible that I have been so stupid!"

"'Spress yerself! promulgate—'luminate de idee!" cried Felix, rushing into the room. "Yah, yah! heah, heah!"

Walter turned towards Ridgley and attempted to speak; but his heart was too full.

"She is unequaled," said Ridgley.

"I feel that I am unworthy of her," replied Walter, greatly wrought upon by the singular *denouement*.

"But to please Augustus," said Andrea.

"Yes," said Walter, earnestly, "to please Augustus, I would undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem."

"It is unnecessary," added Ridgley."

"I can now understand how a certain chain was restored to me," added Walter.

"I was her agent in that transaction," answered Ridgley.

Gentle reader, we will dwell no longer upon these pages. Andrea St. Aubert and Walter Ethington were shortly after united, and the Rangers danced at the wedding. Captain Wilson improved the opportunity to enter into a similar arrangement with Marianna Lee. There was much joy and hilarity upon the occasion, and Felix was never more salubrious in his life.

Not long after this event, it was rumored that Cameron was about to follow suit, and that Rosalia was engaged to the second lieutenant.

Cogswell was never again seen or heard in that part of the country.

Why should we linger to say that Walter and Andrea were happy? It is useless to make the remark, for true love has the power to strew life's rough pathway with flowers.

Time has written its years upon the record of eternity. The empire has rolled westward, and the "Lone Star" has become one of a glorious constellation.

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